

PARNASSUS IN FRANCE

CURRENTS AND CROSS-CURRENTS IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH
LYRIC POETRY

BY

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To D. G. S.

PREFACE

The present work is the outgrowth of some ten years' more or less concentrated study of nineteenth-century French lyric poetry. This study has from time to time assumed concrete form in articles contributed to such periodicals as *Modern Language Notes*, the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, the *Romanic Review*, the *Sewanee Review*, and the *Reflex*, articles which concerned themselves either with the Parnassians as a group or with such individual contributors to *le Parnasse contemporain* as Théodore de Banville, Albert Glatigny, François Coppée and Eugène Manuel. At least two of these articles were read before publication at meetings of the Modern Language Association, and all of them have been carefully revised in the light of the most recent researches before their incorporation into this volume. The chapter on "Théophile Gautier and l'Art pour l'Art" was published in the October-December, 1928, number of the *Sewanee Review*, to the editors of which thanks are herewith extended for permission to reprint. This and other chapters of the book have been read at meetings of the Fortnightly Club of the University of Texas, and the discussion they aroused provided helpful bits of advice and information.

All this is merely by way of corroborating the statement made at the outset of this preface. The author deems such corroboration necessary in view of the fact that his work might seem to run parallel with much recent study of the Parnassians, especially with the admirable little volume of Pierre Martino, *Parnasse et symbolisme*, published by Armand Colin in 1925. The present study had gotten well under way when M. Martino's little book appeared and, despite what might be taken to be a preëemptive statement on the fly-leaf of that volume to the effect that its author is engaged in the preparation of a two-volume work on the *Parnasse contemporain*, the writer deemed it not unwise

to carry his studies to the conclusion that is herewith presented. As a matter of fact, the Parnassians have at last begun to come into their own with the students of literary history in France and in this country; witness such studies as C. Kramer's *André Chénier et les Parnassiens: Leconte de Lisle* (Paris, Champion, 1925), J. K. Ditchy's *le Thème de la mer chez les Parnassiens Leconte de Lisle et Heredia* (Paris, Belles lettres, 1927), Fernand Desonay's *le Rêve hellénique chez les poètes parnassiens* (Paris, Champion, 1928), Dr. S. A. Rhodes' *The Cult of Beauty in Charles Baudelaire* (New York, Institute of French Studies, 1929), and Miodrag Ibrovac's *José-Maria de Heredia* (Paris, Presses françaises, 1923).¹ The fact remains, however, that the Parnassians, as a whole, have not received the attention they deserve among American scholars. The present volume is meant to serve as a preliminary to a complete biographical, bibliographical, and critical study of the ninety-nine contributors to the three volumes of *le Parnasse contemporain* upon which the writer is engaged and which it is his hope and ambition to complete before too many years have elapsed.

A word of grateful appreciation is due Professor Marcel Moraud of the Rice Institute and Professor Philipp Seiberth of the University of Texas, who read the manuscript of this work and offered helpful suggestions, as well as to my wife for assistance in the preparation of the Index and in other mechanical details involved in whipping the manuscript into final shape for publication.

¹The author regrets the fact that he has been unable to consult a book by André Thérive, entitled *le Parnasse* (Paris, les Œuvres représentatives, 1929), which appeared just as the present volume was about to go to press and when its publication could no longer be delayed. A review in *les Nouvelles littéraires* for Nov. 2, 1929, begins with these words: "M. André Thérive consacre son talent, sa dialectique brillante, son intelligence des choses de la littérature à une réhabilitation du Parnasse."

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FOREWORD

In the year 1866, the Paris publisher, Alphonse Lemerre, issued a volume which bore the slightly grandiloquent title of *le Parnasse contemporain: Recueil de vers nouveaux*. This volume was composed exclusively of poems, from the pens of no less than thirty-seven different contributors, ranging from Théophile Gautier, who was then fifty-five years old and was to live only six more years, to José-Maria de Heredia, a mere lad of twenty-four at the time, with forty-one years of life before him in which to reflect upon the enthusiasms of youth and their short-livedness. The success of *le Parnasse contemporain* is best evidenced by the fact that Lemerre published a second and then a third anthology of contemporary poetry, dated 1869 and 1876, respectively, each bearing the same name as that of the initial volume, though the personnel of the contributors was increased and somewhat altered. The influence of these three collections of verse upon their own and the succeeding generations of poets in France is undeniable, and the year of the appearance of the first *Parnasse contemporain* undoubtedly marks a date in the history of French lyric poetry. It was not long before the contributors to the 1866 anthology had been dubbed "les Parnassiens," a sobriquet which in some mouths betokened encomium, in others opprobrium. The efforts of this group of writers, which numbered many of the outstanding French *littérateurs* of the past three-quarters of a century, have been often misunderstood and underestimated even in France, and have remained largely unknown in English-speaking countries. It will be the aim of this study to attempt, in part at least, to fill this gap, by examining the causes which led up to the publication of the *Parnasse contemporain*, the ambitions and personal achievements of the principal Parnassians, and the influence they exerted upon the poets of the following generation. In order to

obtain the proper perspective for an appreciation of this sort, we must cast a rapid glance over the entire course of French lyric poetry. The first chapters of our study, then, will be in the nature of a summary of this literary *genre*, from its beginnings in France down to the eve of the appearance of *le Parnasse contemporain*. This will be followed by a consideration of the work of the leading Parnassians, after which a concluding chapter will be devoted to their successors, the Symbolists, whose efforts were fruitful of such radical changes in the conception and nature of lyric poetry throughout the world of letters.

The present work, thus, is frankly introductory in character. It makes no claim to exhaustiveness, and essays, in the main, to sketch the principal currents of nineteenth-century French lyric poetry, which, for a decade, fused to form the stream that has come to be known as Parnassianism. French lyric poetry is a Protean phenomenon; but, in all its phases and stages, it remains true to that quality which penetrates the whole Gallic art-life, namely, a striving after aesthetic perfection which knows no compromise, which scorns easy successes and golden harvests, and sets itself resolutely to the task of fixing the evanescent beauties of the universe upon the immortal pallet of art. Some of the poets treated in this study are interesting more for their aspirations than for their actual accomplishments; all of them stand as undying models of devotion to their art, all of them heard life as a gorgeous diapason of cosmic music, and attempted to catch occasional chords and cadences of this music in that microcosm which we call the lyric poem. Though there were very few, if any, Goethes and Shelleys among the Parnassians, the world of poetry is infinitely the richer for the existence of a group which counted in its midst a Leconte de Lisle, a Théodore de Banville, and a Charles Baudelaire.

CHAPTER ONE

FRENCH LYRIC POETRY FROM ITS BEGINNINGS TO THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

The studies of eminent scholars have led, by inference rather than from the existence of actual documents, to the belief that lyric poetry in France is almost, if not quite, as old as the French language itself, that is, that it goes back perhaps as far as the seventh or the eighth century of the present era.¹ This deduction is based upon the existence of early ecclesiastical denunciations, aimed at the writers of religious, satirical, and amorous poems seemingly in the vernacular; these poems, however, if they were really written in French, are no longer extant. The oldest lyric poems we possess can not have been composed before the eleventh century. From this time on, there seems to have been a more or less uninterrupted output, and the *genre* attained its apogee in mediæval France during the first forty years of the thirteenth century. M. Alfred Jeanroy classifies these lyrics into the following rubrics: the *chanson d'histoire*, also called *romance*, a sort of narrative poem which apparently did not survive the thirteenth century; the *chanson à personnages*, usually in monologue or dialogue form, thus bordering upon the dramatic; the *aube*, a song of lovers' parting at daybreak; the *pastourelle*, portraying the loves of knights and shepherdesses; and the *rondet* or *chanson à danser*, a roundelay with the inevitable refrain. The first two, and probably the last, of these five types are often popular in subject-matter and probably also in origin; the *aube* and the *pastourelle*, on the other hand, are decidedly "courtly" in nature. The courtly lyric had been introduced into the north of France, about 1150, as a result of the marriage of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine,

¹Those interested in the subject may consult Petit de Julleville: *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française* (Paris, Colin, 1896, vol. I, chap. 5: *Les Chansons*, written by M. Alfred Jeanroy, an authority on these matters).

by strolling poets, called *trouvères*, who had been inspired by the work of their southern colleagues, the *troubadours*. It was in that region of southern France known as the Provence and in the Provençal tongue that the lyric poem, as a finished work of art, was most assiduously cultivated, under the high patronage of the courts and frequently by persons of royal blood. Here, we are told, flourished the so-called "courts of love," with the elaborate codification of the *gaie science*, the "gay science," of love,² which were soon imitated in the northern courts of Champagne, France, and Flanders. The subject of almost all these courtly lyrics (and no less than twenty-one hundred are to be counted in the mediæval poetry of northern France) was illicit love, a theme the various changes of which were rung by such *trouvères* as Blondel de Nesles, Thibaut de Champagne, and Conon de Béthune, knights equally skilled in tournaments of the lance and of the song.

With only rare exceptions, then (as in the poetry of the commoner, Rutebeuf, who has been styled "un des poètes les plus personnels du treizième siècle"),³ the mediæval French lyric was practiced by courtiers and court-followers. In their hands, it became a highly complicated, over-refined instrument, with fixed forms such as the *rondeau*, the *ballade*, the *chant royal*. These types intrenched themselves strongly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which were marked by the work of a Guillaume de Machaut, a Christine de Pisan, an Alain Chartier, and a Charles d'Orléans. In Christine de Pisan, we have "la première femme en France, qui ait eu un savoir étendu et général, et une passion sincère de l'étude; elle a fondé la lignée des femmes savantes et des femmes auteurs."⁴ Alain Chartier was one of the most widely-read poets of his day, the author

²Edgar Saltus, in his *Historia Amoris* (New York, Brentano's, 1922), has written entertainingly of the rôle of the gay science in mediæval life and letters.

³Paris et Langlois: *Chrestomathie du moyen âge* (13th ed., Paris, Hachette, p. 265).

⁴Petit de Julleville, *op. cit.*, vol. II, chap. 7 (*La Poésie au moyen âge*, p. 357) written by Petit de Julleville himself.

of elegant, if not even frivolous, poems on the subject of love and its various corollaries. But it was in the hands of Charles d'Orléans that the courtly lyric in mediæval France attained to its greatest heights. The head of one of the noblest houses of his country, enmeshed in the civil broils and foreign wars that were then rending France, he was taken captive at the battle of Agincourt in 1415, and spent twenty-five weary years of imprisonment in England. The consolation of this trying period was the development of his innate poetic faculties, and Charles d'Orléans gave himself up to the composition of verses of a highly artistic finish. It was in the fixed lyric *genres* that this genius best revealed itself, in the *rondeau*, the *ballade*, and the *chanson*. These types and such related stanzaic forms as the *triolet*, the *villanelle*, and the *madrigal* were to lie virtually dormant for almost four centuries after the death of Charles d'Orléans in 1465; their resuscitation in the middle of the nineteenth century was due to the revival of interest in mediæval lyric poetry engineered by the Parnassians, under the especial guidance of one of the most noteworthy poets of that group, Théodore de Banville. Charles d'Orléans, thus, may be regarded as one of the lineal ancestors of the Parnassians and deserves, if for no other reason, to be here "remembered for good."

The greatest lyric poet of the fifteenth century in France, however, was to be neither a prince of the blood nor a courtier, but a scapegrace *par excellence*—François Villon, cheater at dice, consort of low women, thief, murderer, gallows-bird. The rascally career of Villon is almost too well-known to need recounting. Of such obscure origin that even the name he bore was not his own (he had assumed that of an uncle, and his identity is marked in various documents by a veritable legion of "aliases"), he received an excellent education for his day, and obtained the degree of *maître ès arts* at the comparatively early age of twenty-one. Instead, however, of following the scholarly or clerical profession for which he had presumably been preparing himself, he fell in with evil companions and was

implicated in divers crimes—the robbery of the Collège de Navarre, the murder of a priest—for which he spent several sessions in prison and was rescued from the scaffold only by royal reprieve. In the turmoil of all these follies and escapades, Villon found the time to write two poems which entitle him to a place in the very front rank of French lyric poets. The first of these, *le Petit testament* (1456), is composed of forty eight-verse stanzas, each of them a more or less humorous or satirical legacy, whence the sub-title, *les Lais*. This work was far surpassed by its successor, *le Grand testament* (1461), a much more ambitious poem comprising one hundred seventy-three stanzas and a number of interpolated *ballades* and *rondeaux*. The satire of the earlier composition was not lacking here; but the maturer Villon has run the gamut of the emotions, from filial and sensual love to hate and fear, in the *Grand testament*, and has bared his soul in a manner that was rarely to be equalled before the outpourings of Lamartine and his brother-Romanticists. As Petit de Julleville has put it: “C’est ici de la poésie personnelle, s’il en fut jamais.”⁵

Villon, far more than Charles d’Orléans, was the idol of Théodore de Banville and his “wing” of the Parnassian group. The reason for this fact lies, not in the individualism of his poetry (for the Parnassians, as we shall see, revolted in disgust from the often mawkish self-exposures of some of the principal Romanticists and strictly eschewed them) but in the polished artistry of the ruffian-poet. Both the *Testaments* are composed in the most hide-bound forms; the *huitain*, or eight-line stanza, is made up of octosyllabic verses rhyming unchangeably *ababbcbc*; the *ballades* and *rondeaux* were stanzaic moulds as rigid as plaster-casts. Poetasters, hampered by these prosodic straightjackets, were helpless to do more than manufacture rhymes; Villon moved about as freely in them as though they were non-existent, and created poems at once singing in their musical

⁵*Op. cit.*, vol. II, chap. 7, p. 389.

beauty and moving in the pathos with which they are informed. The mental acrobatics involved in the composition of the *ballade* and its sister-types sent them into a desuetude from which they were not to be snatched until the advent of the Parnassians.

The emotional tone of Villon's poetry raised it so far above the productions of his contemporaries and predecessors that Gaston Paris, in his admirable biographical study, was led to term Villon "le premier des poètes modernes."⁶ Certain it is that, though he had admirers and imitators by the score, he had no equals in his day and no successors worthy the name. Caught in the slough of versifying gymnastics, lyric poetry at the end of the fifteenth century was strangled to death by rhymesters whose preoccupation with trick-rhymes, word-plays, and involved stanzaic forms robbed it of all semblance of thought and meaning. It had become a mummy swaddled in the bands of formal artificiality and flatulent verbosity.⁷ It was one of the tasks of the Renaissance to breathe into this mummy the fire of renewed life.

The Renaissance was brought into France by the armies of Francis I who, crossing the Alps to wage their master's wars, carried back from Italy a love for the humanistic arts which had made of that country the rival of Periclean Athens. The first poets to respond to this new stimulus were intimately connected with the pleasure-loving Francis I, patron of Benvenuto Cellini and of Leonardo da Vinci—his sister Marguerite de Navarre, and Clément Marot, court-poet successively to this princess and to her royal brother. Marot, himself the son of a versifier who had seen service at the courts of Anne of Brittany, Louis XII, and Francis I, is the bright light of an otherwise rather sombre literary firmament in the first half of the sixteenth

⁶*François Villon (les Grands écrivains français*, 3d ed., Paris, Hachette, 1921, p. 153).

⁷An exhaustive study of the poetry of this period is to be found in Henry Guy: *Histoire de la poésie française au XVI siècle* (2 vols., Paris, Champion, 1910, 1926).

century. Having learned the mechanics of poetry from his father and read industriously in the French poets of the preceding centuries, Clément early set his feet in the tracks of the elder Marot by attaching himself in 1518, at the age of twenty-three, to the court of Marguerite de Navarre in the quality of secretary. Then began a life which, for adventure and suffering, falls only little short of that of Villon, despite the fact that Francis I, whose service Marot entered upon the death of his father in 1526, stood by him loyally in many an emergency. Like Villon, Marot twice knew the inside of prisons, once on the charge of heresy and again for having engaged in a scuffle with the night-watch; the bugaboo of the Lutheran apostasy continuing to hang over his head, he was almost imprisoned a third time on the accusation of having eaten bacon during Lent. Like Villon, too, Marot spent his last years in a semi-enforced, semi-voluntary exile from Paris; after unhappy sojourns in Geneva and Venice, he died on foreign soil, in the city of Turin, in 1544. Fortunately for the poet, during all this period of vexation, as he tells us, "abandonné ne m'a jamais la Muse,"⁸ and the resilient, epicurean nature with which he was endowed enabled him to brush off lightly the tribulations he endured. It is this carefree, pleasure-loving side of his character rather than the bitterness that might be expected from a victim of political and religious persecution, that is revealed in his best poems, and that earned him the esteem of his contemporaries as the first lyric poet of his day.

But Marot, steeped in the allegorical lore of the Middle Ages and escaping only with difficulty from the jugglery that passed for poetry in his youth,⁹ lived and wrote in a transitional era. Five short years after his death, a group of seven poets, all of them well versed in Greek and Latin

⁸Vide Epistle LVI (*Œuvres complètes*, ed. P. Jannet, vol. I, Paris, Flammarion, n.d., p. 261).

⁹Cf. Epistles XXXVIII and XXXIX. "A Alexis Jure, de Quiers," and "A une demoiselle malade," (Jannet, vol. I, pp. 208-10).

poetry, banded together for the express purpose of elevating French literature to the heights on which, they thought, it was meant to dwell. As this group proposed to revivify French poetry by abandoning the mediæval forms and returning to those of classical antiquity, it baptized itself, in imitation of seven Greek poets who had flourished in Alexandria in the time of the Ptolemies, with the name of one of the constellations, *la Pléiade*. The two fixed stars of the constellation were Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585) and Joachim du Bellay (1525–1560); the five lesser stars were Remi Belleau, Antoine Baïf, Etienne Jodelle, Pontus de Thyard, and the scholar Daurat. The first work published by the *Pléiade* was du Bellay's epoch-making *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549) which maintained that French was as fit a vehicle as any other language for literary masterpieces in every *genre*, and that the poets of France must aim at the achievement of the lofty seriousness and the artistic perfection of the Greeks and the Romans. Banished forever were to be the frivolous gambolings and the prosodic prestidigitation of the late mediæval poets. Happily, the members of the *Pléiade* were not mere reformers in theory only; all of them were accomplished men-of-letters, and at least two of them, du Bellay himself and Ronsard, the acknowledged head of the group, are to be numbered in the very forefront of poetic geniuses. An erudite, yet appreciative, student of the classics, Ronsard avowedly followed in their footsteps, and looked with scorn upon the feeble efforts of his predecessors in his native land. From Pindar, thus, he borrowed the form and style of his five books of *Odes*; upon Callimachus, he patterned his *Hymnes*; in the sonnets that, in large measure, make up his *Amours de Cassandre*, *Amours de Marie*, *Sonnets pour Hélène*,¹⁰ he is plainly inspired by Petrarch; Horace and Anacreon, too, receive the supreme compliment of imitation. As Ronsard grew older and his fund of experiences increased, he became less and less derivative, more and more personal in tone; many of his sonnets, for

¹⁰*Œuvres complètes* (ed. P. Laumonier, Paris, Lemerre, 1914–19).

example, overflow with an ardent passion welling straight from the heart. The success of his efforts earned him royal recognition; Charles IX virtually made of him his poet laureate. Taking this office seriously, Ronsard set himself the task of composing a national epic, a project he had long been cherishing; but the death of the king in 1574 cut short his attempt to establish himself as the French Homer, and his *Franciade* expired after the completion of four cantos. Returning to the field in which he excelled, lyric poetry, Ronsard added a few laurels to those he had won in the days of his prime, and at his death he was acclaimed the foremost poet of Europe. His fame, however, was short-lived; by a peculiar trick of fate, the French classicists of the seventeenth century ignored him almost completely, and it remained for Sainte-Beuve and the Parnassians, nearly three centuries later, to rehabilitate his glory.

Joachim du Bellay, who, in one of his sonnets, addresses Ronsard as "la moitié de mon âme,"¹¹ only rarely achieves the sublimity of his "other half." He strikes his purest lyric note in a series of sonnets which he called *les Regrets*, inspired by a sojourn in Rome in the suite of his cousin, the Cardinal du Bellay. At first carried to the heights of enthusiasm by the opportunity of viewing at close range "the glory that was Rome," he was soon thoroughly disillusioned and began to pine for his native land: "France, mère des arts, des armes, et des lois,"¹² and to curse the unhappy day whereon he had abandoned her.¹³ The greatest of his sonnets, beginning: "Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,"¹⁴ laments: "Quand reverray-je, hélas! de mon petit village Fumer la cheminée"; and in another: "Heureux celui qui peut long temps suivre la guerre,"¹⁵ he declares that lucky is he "qui a pu sans peler vivre trois ans

¹¹*Œuvres choisies* (ed. L. Becq de Fouquières, Paris, Charpentier, 1876, p. 206).

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 228-29.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

à Rome." In the *Regrets* and in others of his lyric poems, du Bellay, though he did not rise to the elevated, to be sure occasionally stilted, dignity of Ronsard, is a truly great poet, whose influence would perhaps have made itself more keenly felt but for the renown of his colleague; and when the Parnassians turned back the book of French poetry and leaped over the "golden" seventeenth century to find inspiration in those which had preceded it, they read lovingly not only the *triolet*s of Charles d'Orléans, the *ballades* of Villon, and the *Odes* and *Sonnets* of Ronsard, but also the *Regrets* of the author of the *Défense et illustration de la langue française*.

Du Bellay died a young man, in 1560; Ronsard survived him by a quarter of a century, living to see the *Pléiade* pass from its zenith to its nadir. For, by a strange phenomenon, the course of lyric poetry in France suddenly found itself securely dammed up, and so it remained until Lamartine came to release the long pent-up waters which leaped forth into the roaring torrent known as Romanticism. Because of the intimate, highly personal tone of the Ronsardian poetry, because, too, of its variety and richness of versification and the hybridization of the language by the introduction of Greek and Latin derivatives, Malherbe, the Lycurgus who laid down the laws that were to govern the productions of the great classicists of the seventeenth century, banished the *Pléiade* and its work from the minds of his contemporaries. The seventeenth century in France was an age of "good form" in all aspects of life; and, "good form," though it might welcome the tragedies of a Corneille and a Racine, the comedies of a Molière, and the fables of a La Fontaine, did not tolerate the outpourings in verse of one's own passions and emotions. The eighteenth century merely fawned upon its predecessor; moreover, the empirical attitude which characterized the "age of rationalism" was hostile to the emotional individualism of lyric poetry. To be sure, there were quasi-lyric poets in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France: Voiture and Saint-Amand, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and the abbé Delille, among

others. But to what limbo of forgotten poets would not one have to go to rescue for the eyes of the curious the verses of these men? It was only with the appearance of André Chénier, the young poet whose genius was so prematurely cut short by the Reign of Terror, that the *genre* enjoyed a rebirth. Here, again, we have a poet of the warmth and fire, the thorough classical erudition and the finished technique of Ronsard. Like the poets of the *Pléiade*, Chénier poured his poetry into almost exclusively classical moulds:¹⁶ the bucolic, after Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus; the elegy, after Tibullus and Propertius; the ode, Pindaric or Horatian; the epistle and the iamb, into the last-named of which types Chénier breathed all his overpowering love of liberty and all his furious hatred of the Jacobin despots who were making such a mockery of liberty. In the very shadow of the guillotine, he continued to asseverate his scorn for the Marats, the Robespierres, and the other "hyenas" of the Terror; and, despite the intercession of family and friends, Chénier paid the price for this independence of spirit only a few days before the events which put an end to the tyranny of Robespierre and his associates. As one critic has put it, Chénier "est de son temps par ses idées, de l'antiquité par son art."¹⁷

Reminiscent of the *Pléiade* by his love of the Greeks and Latins, prognostic of the Romanticists by the passionateness of his love-poetry and his political satires, Chénier, thus, is the only truly important link between French lyric poetry of the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The untimeliness of his end prevented his putting his verses into the form he had projected for them; so that the manuscripts which he left at his death contained comparatively few completed poems, imbedded in a mass of fragments of stanzas, of lines even, and numerous notes and indications. It is not easy, therefore, properly to evaluate Chénier's work or its possibilities; but when we recall that the first

¹⁶*Œuvres complètes* (3 vols., ed. Dimoff, Paris, Delagrave, n.d.).

¹⁷Abry, Audic, Crouzet: *Histoire illustrée de la littérature française* (Paris, Didier, 1913, p. 427).

published edition of the Chénier manuscripts dates from 1819,¹⁸ only a year before the publication of Lamartine's *Premières méditations poétiques*, and when we place the *Amours* of Chénier alongside the love-poetry of Lamartine and the *Nuits* of Musset, we must admit that this unhappy victim of the guillotine was among those who encouraged the Romanticists in their habit of thinking aloud and laying bare their inmost emotions. And in his cultivation of harmonious form and euphonious line, Chénier was among those who may be considered direct precursors of the Parnassians.¹⁹

At this point, we may pause for a brief summary. Our study thus far has made it apparent that lyric poetry in France probably dates from the very beginnings of the language which the victorious Romans grafted upon the primitive Celtic inhabitants of the land. This poetry, perhaps popular in origin, has come down to us alongside the great epic cycles of Charlemagne, Arthur, and Troy, in forms appropriated by the *trouvères* and the minstrels—poets and singers of the mediæval courts. We have seen that kings and princes—a Richard Cœur-de-lion, a Charles d'Orléans, and a Marguerite de Navarre—were among those who worshipped at the altar of Erato; and that the graces and refinements of this courtly verse paled almost into insignificance before the vigorous, yet melodious, lyrics of the jail-bird Villon. We have noted the achievement of Ronsard and the *Pléiade* in introducing into France the whole enchanting literature of classical antiquity that had so long remained a closed book; and we have observed that, during the century generally styled the "golden age" of French literature, lyric poetry was, to all intents and purposes, as good as dead. As a consequence, when the Romanticists, inspired by the spirit of Chénier, under the leadership of Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, Musset, and

¹⁸Edited by Henri de Latouche (Paris, Baudouin frères, 1819).

¹⁹Vide the very thorough study of C. Kramer: *André Chénier et la poésie parnassienne—Leconte de Lisle* (Paris, Champion, 1925).

Gautier, arose in their might and smote their classical predecessors a blow from which there was no recovery, the mediæval and early modern lyric poets returned to their own. All these facts it was necessary to establish as preliminary to our study of the Parnassians, sometimes called the "second generation of Romanticists," for they deliberately sought inspiration in the work of Charles d'Orléans, Villon, and the *Pléiade*, and at times sedulously aped both their form and their subject-matter. Without some knowledge of the course of lyric poetry in France through the ages, the Parnassians would be an enigmatic phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LYRIC POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN FRANCE

The year 1674 saw the publication of the work which was, so to speak, to cap the climax of the age of classicism in France. A year after the death of Molière, whose comedies had proved at once the delight of court and commoner, seven years after *Andromaque* had inaugurated the line of Racine's lofty tragedies, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, donning the robe of Horace, wrote his *Art poétique* and thereby put the finishing touches to the task that had been undertaken three-quarters of a century earlier by François de Malherbe. With the severity of a jurist, he commanded that poets must adhere rigidly to the tenets of Aristotle and Horace in the composition of the various *genres*—epic, dramatic, and lyric; and he ordained *le bon sens* as the guide to be followed unflinchingly in the treatment of subject-matter. Now, whether we like it or not, a lyric poet worthy of the name does not, indeed must not, sparkle with common-sense; he must be, in some respects at least, a mystic, he must give free rein to the emotions struggling within him for verbal expression, he must be acutely sensitive to the beauties in the phenomenal world in which he moves. To be sure, Boileau had ordered: "Que la nature donc soit votre guide unique";¹ but Boileau, a bourgeois of Paris who is said never in his life to have passed beyond the confines of the Parisian suburb of Auteuil, was notoriously impervious to the riches in wood, field, and stream; with him, "nature" denotes, always and solely, "human nature." Malherbe had told France that the lyric poetry of the *Pléiade* was shamelessly "bad form"; Boileau merely dug his heel deeper into the serpent that had been thus mercilessly scotched. But lyric poetry was too hardy a reptile to die; after lying in a comatose state for another three-quarters of a century,

¹*Art poétique*, canto III (*Œuvres poétiques*, Paris, Lefevre, 1858, p. 200).

it began feebly to beat about for breath and, before very long, it had come vigorously to life. In order to disarm suspicion, it took its first steps in disguise. The real lyric poets of the eighteenth century were writers of prose: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who made it fashionable for men and women to weep over the joys and sufferings of fellow-humans and the marvels of nature; and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who clothed his descriptions of the tropics in a Joseph's-coat of gorgeous French. Following in the footsteps of these two great *prosateurs*, Chateaubriand published, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, his *Atala*, ostensibly a romance of American Indian life, actually a prose poem from beginning to end. By this time, the mechanical coldness of classical tragedy had begun to pall; and men took to asking themselves why it was necessary, when their emotions were clamoring for expression, to clothe them in forms sanctified by Homer and Theocritus, by Pindar and Anacreon, by Virgil, Ovid, and Horace, and in a language which had been so emasculated by the preciousness of the seventeenth century. The French Revolution had demonstrated the possibility of a complete overthrow of the old political and social regime; why could not literature, in the same way, rise in an irresistible gesture and burst asunder the shackles of classicism?

At this juncture, there appeared upon the scene a young poet who was to cast the brand which ignited the roaring flame of the French Romantic movement—Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869). The son of a noble family of the provinces a trifle tainted by the Voltaire-Rousseau heresies, Lamartine knew, from earliest childhood, the beauty of life in the country. His poetry was, thus “dès son premier éveil, tout imprégnée de parfums, pénétrée de souffles, brillante d’images, ou gracieuses ou mélancoliques, qui reflètent les mille visages de la nature.”² Receiving the substantial education bestowed upon the sons of the nobility and naturally a voracious reader, he was an appreciative admirer of

²René Doumic: *Lamartine* (Paris, Hachette, 1912, p. 14).

the classics, Greek and Roman as well as French; but he read with even greater gusto the *Confessions* and the *Emile* of Rousseau, Goethe's *Werther*, and Chateaubriand's *René*. Before very long, he had been swept into the gale of Byron-enthusiasm that had struck France (a French edition of Byron's works appeared in Paris as early as 1818 and formed one of the principal topics of conversation in the *salons*) and he had read *Childe Harold*. The heaviest guns of the Romantic artillery outside of France!³ With such a course of reading to inflame his soul, by nature sensitive to the cosmic music, all that was needed to make of Lamartine a lyric poet was a stirring experience, a great suffering. Both of these came to him, simultaneously and as though by predestination. In the autumn of 1816, Lamartine, seeking spiritual refreshment in the magnificent environs of Aix-les-bains, regally situated at the head of the lac du Bourget in the Savoian Alps, met the ailing wife of a Dr. Charles, a physicist of some renown in his day. Mme. Charles was a charming young woman of a highly emotional nature which her fifty-seven-year-old husband had been unable to satisfy. What more natural than that the budding poet should fall instantaneously and passionately in love with her and that his love should be returned? The idyll lasted during the month of their sojourn at Aix, and was continued, on a somewhat more moderate scale of passion, at the home of Mme. Charles in Paris throughout the winter and spring of 1817. Leaving her in May with the promise of a return visit to Aix in the fall, Lamartine waited in vain, only to learn, when it was almost too late, that his Julie (whom he was to immortalize as the Elvire of his poems) was mortally ill. Her death, which occurred before the end of the year, shook Lamartine to the very depths of his being. Employing the Goethean method of seeking relief from his suffering, Lamartine poured out his

³For a full discussion of Lamartine's reading as a young man, vide Lanson: Introduction to the *Grands écrivains français* edition of Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* (Paris, Hachette, 1922, pp. XII-XVII).

sorrow, his weariness with life, his questionings of the meaning of life and death, in a series of poems which struck the personal note of Ronsard and Chénier without the trappings of classical imagery and periphrasis and marked the real rebirth of lyric poetry in France. Though it is true that Lamartine had had love affairs before his meeting with Mme. Charles, and that, less than a year after Julie's death he made the acquaintance of the English girl whom he was before long to marry, this "grande passion" was the flash that illuminated for him the path of letters and that inspired the composition of at least two of the finest lyric poems in the language, "le Lac" and "Souvenir." Desiring to take his mind off the tragedy that had so darkened his life, the poet began to frequent the exclusive Paris salons, where his first *Méditations poétiques* were read and applauded. This applause encouraged him to venture the dreaded step of publication and the year 1820 was marked as a milestone in French literature by the appearance of *les Méditations poétiques*.

The success of the slender volume of verse was stupendous; it went through edition after edition and was read in every part of France. Three years later, a second volume appeared: *les Nouvelles méditations poétiques*. In the same year, Charles Nodier, a writer of novels and tales stamped with the impress of the German Romanticists, gathered about him, in his apartment at the Arsenal in Paris, the group in which was to be crystallized the French Romantic movement. Strangely enough, Lamartine, whose example fired all the young poets of the day, was never officially a member of the Romantic *cénacles*, and scarcely took any cognizance of their efforts. Though he published volumes of verse until as late as 1839, he never seemed to take very seriously his poetic vocation, and claimed that his compositions were all improvised. After 1830, his political ambitions, which carried him to the very threshold of the presidency of the Second Republic, completely weaned him away from pure literature. Long before, he had been severely criticised for the slipshod nature of much of his

poetry, which manifested itself in faulty rhymes, prosodically incorrect verses, mixed metaphors, and even grammatical mistakes. Lamartine had performed the invaluable service of awakening his contemporaries to the deathless beauty of lyric poetry; but his dilletantish and negligent attitude towards his work repelled the more finished artists among the Romanticists, while his excessive exaltation of the emotions, coupled with the "mooning" atmosphere that enshrouded his poems,⁴ caused him to be rejected as a model by the poets of the Parnassian group.

But Lamartine, it must be repeated, had "started the ball rolling." Among those who attended the gatherings at the Nodier *cénacle*, there was a young man who had just attained his majority and who was imbued with the notion that the time had come for the regeneration of French literature. Finding the Nodier group too classical in its predilections, this young man—Victor Hugo—drew away some of its more radical members, and with the support of Sainte-Beuve, then composing verses under the pseudonym of Joseph Delorme but later to become France's greatest literary critic, organized, in 1827, a *salon* of his own, presided over by the winsome Mme. Hugo. Prominent in this group besides Hugo and Sainte-Beuve, were Alfred de Vigny, Alexandre Dumas, the brothers Emile and Antoni Deschamps, and later Musset and Gautier. It was to this group that Hugo read, amid the plaudits of his comrades, the celebrated preface to his five-act tragedy, *Cromwell*. This preface, which has justly been styled the "manifesto" of the Romanticists, called upon the new generation of French poets to trample under foot the entire code of classical poetry. "Mettons le marteau," Hugo conjured his hearers and readers, "dans les théories, les poétiques, et les

⁴One of the Parnassians, Philoxène Boyer, gives voice to his distaste for the Lamartinian atmosphere, in the following lines from "A une patricienne" (*les Deux saisons*, Paris, Lemerre, 1867, p. 82):

"Je ne suis pas celui qui s'éprend des fontaines,
Des sables d'or des lacs, des lueurs incertaines
Que l'aurore répand sur les bois."

systèmes. Jetons bas ce vieux plâtre, qui masque la façade de l'art. Il n'y a ni règles ni modèles."⁵ The poet, he declared, must seek inspiration only from "nature"—his sole guides must be "la nature et la vérité"—and, under no conditions, should he merely imitate other poets. The Romantic movement, thus, as Hugo viewed it, was the champion of "libéralisme en littérature"⁶ in much the same manner that the French Revolution had advocated political and social freedom. The attack was directed especially at the rigid forms of classical French poetry, the restriction of the choice of subject-matter to Greek, Roman, and Biblical antiquity, and the stiltedly inept style in which, more particularly, the eighteenth-century imitations of the "golden-age" poets were clothed. The *Cromwell* preface was a clarion call that shook French literature to its foundations; and three short years later, classicism was ignominiously smothered by the reverberating audacity of Hugo's *Hernani*.

Whatever may be one's opinion today of the work of Victor Hugo, he was for an entire half-century the unquestioned oracle of French literature. Even when the flat failure of his last play, *les Burgraves* (1843), sounded the knell of Romanticism as the dominant literary movement, Hugo continued to be revered by his younger contemporaries. The Parnassians, most of whom began writing from 1850 to 1860, looked up to Hugo as the "artiste parfait," for "toute poésie vient de lui, se meut en lui, retourne à lui."⁷ Despite the fact that the *coup d'état* which had placed Napoleon III on the throne of the Second Empire had sent Hugo into an exile which he refused to terminate, though he might have done so long before, until the catastrophic days of 1870, his presence was as keenly felt in Paris as though he were actually in the capital, and not in grandiose

⁵Preface to *Cromwell* (*Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Hetzel-Quantin, n.d., vol. XXI, p. 44).

⁶Vide preface to *Hernani* (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. XXII, p. 1).

⁷Catulle Mendès: *la Légende du Parnasse contemporain* (Brussels, Brancart, 1884, p. 24).

isolation on the island of Guernsey. The Parnassian, Albert Glatigny, in a poem entitled "le Château romantique," written before 1864, declares that Hugo, "auguste, puissant, entier," occupies the highest tower of the castle.⁸ And his death in 1885, at the advanced age of eighty-three, was the occasion for an apotheosis afforded only Voltaire in 1778, and the now comparatively insignificant abbé Delille in 1813. The tremendous vitality of the man and his amazing versatility (he was equally at home in lyric, epic, and satiric poetry, in verse and prose drama and in novel), coupled with his undoubted literary qualities, combined to make of Hugo the outstanding figure in nineteenth-century French letters.

The formalism and authoritarianism that had marked the seventeenth century in France had made it the era of the drama; the application of science to literature that resulted in what we call Realism was to favor the development of the novel as the principal *genre* of pure literature. Between these two came the brief but colorful reign of Romanticism; and Romanticism, with its exaltation of the individual and his emotions, its literary anarchy, was the age, *par excellence*, of lyric poetry. To be sure, most of the Romantic authors tried their hand at other types; but even when they were writing in prose, the lyric note was almost always uppermost. Of the forty-four volumes of the complete works of Hugo, more than a third are devoted to his poetry; and critics are agreed that his greatest dramas will live chiefly by the music and the passionate quiver of their lines. Hugo's first volume was a collection of *Odes* (1822) that showed the imprint of Chénier, Chateaubriand, and Lamartine; his last years were dedicated almost exclusively to the service of poetry.

If one were to be asked for the distinguishing characteristic of Hugo the poet, the answer, probably delivered without much hesitancy, would be his "oracularness." Throughout the entire corpus of his lyric poetry, there runs

⁸*Poésies complètes* (Paris, Lemerre, n.d., p. 213).

a vaticinal strain that reveals a Hugo ambitious for a seat among the Isaiahs and Jeremiahs of history. In the very first poem of his maiden collection, the *Odes*, Hugo, not yet in his twenties, enunciates his conception of the poet's function:

"Non, le poète sur la terre
Console, exilé volontaire,
Les tristes humains dans leurs fers."⁹

This is the dominant note of his poetry, despite the fact that he can be, on occasion, the poet of love, of domestic happiness, of the beauties of nature; he rarely "lets himself go," so that, even in his most intimate verses, one misses the whole-souled abandon of Musset, the elegiac ardor of Lamartine. Like Chateaubriand's René, seated at the mouth of Aetna, Hugo conceives of himself as viewing the world from on high and thundering his message, in words of flame, to the puny humans at his feet. At the sight of a star-bespangled heaven, he is moved to the following un-bashful outburst:¹⁰

"Souvent alors j'ai cru que ces soleils de flamme
Dans ce monde endormi n'échauffaient que mon âme,
Qu'à les comprendre seul j'étais prédestiné;
Que j'étais, moi, vaine ombre obscure et taciturne,
Le roi mystérieux de la pompe nocturne;
Que le ciel pour moi s'était illuminé!"

Lamartine and Vigny, too, were concerned, in their poetry, with the age-old problems of metaphysics, were given to rapturous mystical communion; but Lamartine, as we have already seen, considered his poetry a mere avocation, while Vigny, withdrawn into his "tour d'ivoire," paid little heed to the audience he was addressing. Hugo, on the other hand, took himself most seriously, too seriously indeed; for his work would have been far better for an occasional flash

⁹*Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 40.

¹⁰*Les Feuilles d'automne* (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, p. 336).

of humor. Henri-Frédéric Amiel has devoted an interesting entry of his *Journal intime*¹¹ to taking the wind out of the sails of the Hugonian caravel. "Le grand poète," says Amiel, "ne peut se débarrasser du charlatan qui est en lui. Quelques piqures de l'ironie voltairienne auraient dégonflé ce génie ballonné et l'auraient rendu plus fort en le rendant plus sensé. C'est un malheur public que le plus puissant poète de la nation n'ait pas mieux compris son rôle et qu'à l'envers des prophètes hébreux qui châtaient par amour, il encense ses concitoyens par système et par orgueil. La France, c'est le monde; Paris, c'est la France; Hugo, c'est Paris. Peuples, prosternez-vous!" Thus, Hugo concludes his *Feuilles d'automne* (1831), a collection of poems consecrated to the peaceful joys of the fireside, to the declaration of his graduation from this puerile stage.

"Oh, la muse se doit aux peuples sans défense.
J'oublie alors l'amour, la famille, l'enfance,
Et les molles chansons, et le loisir serein,
Et j'ajoute à ma lyre une corde d'airain."¹²

Henceforth, Hugo is the "vates," the familiar of God and his phophets, whose duty, "pareil aux prophètes," is to "faire flamboyer l'avenir",¹³ the political seer of the first half of *les Chants du crépuscule* (1835); the chastising angel of *les Châtiments* (1853); the epic bard of *la Légende des siècles* (1859, 1877, 1883); the social poet of *l'Année terrible* (1871); the apostle of his own brand of Theism in *le Pape* (1878) and *Religions et religion* (1880).

In the midst of his preoccupation with the strivings and sufferings of humanity, Hugo found time for the depiction of the more personal emotions—love of woman, love of children and grand-children, adoration of God that gives

¹¹*Journal intime, précédé d'une étude par Edmond Scherer* (13th ed., Geneva, Georg, 1919, vol. II, pp. 228–29. Entry dated April 26, 1877).

¹²Concluding lines of "Amis, un dernier mot," in *les Feuilles d'automne* (*Œuvres comp.*, vol. II, p. 429).

¹³"La Fonction du poète" in *les Rayons et les ombres* (*Œuv. comp.*, vol. III, p. 389).

to many of his poems a marked resemblance to the Davidic psalms, prostration before the glory of nature—in such volumes as *les Voix intérieures* (1837), *les Rayons et les Ombres* (1840), *les Contemplations* (1856), the second part of which, *Aujourd'hui*, is largely a threnody on the death, by drowning, of the poet's daughter, *les Chansons des rues et des bois* (1865), and *l'Art d'être grand-père* (1877). Like most of his brother-poets, Hugo had been touched by the Byronic afflatus, which manifested itself in the pseudo-Orientalism of *les Orientales* (1829); no less than a half-dozen poems of this volume celebrate the Greek struggle for independence during the course of which Byron lost his life. But Hugo's muse could not content herself with the joys and sufferings of an individual; her concern was with the macrocosm in every microcosm. A beautiful landscape, a gripping sea-scape, a mother watching over her children, even the humble cow suckling her young¹⁴—these were but the texts for sermons or meditations on the part of the poet. And always Hugo made himself the champion of the down-trodden and the defenceless; the humanitarian in him subordinated the lyric poet. In the concluding poem of *les Voix intérieures*, he exhorts his muse, "Muse de la loi juste et du droit souverain," in the following terms:

"Aie au milieu de tous l'attitude élevée
D'une lente déesse à punir réservée,
Qui, recueillant sa force ainsi qu'un saint trésor,
Pourrait depuis longtemps et ne veut pas encor!"¹⁵

And: "En attendant, demeure impassible et sereine." This note of "impassibility," which Hugo is striking here only *ad interim*, was to be taken up by some of the leaders of the Parnassians and made the keynote of their poetry.

Hugo has been considered here at such length because of the fact that he was the unquestioned well-spring for many

¹⁴Vide "la Vache" (*les Voix intérieures*, *Œuv. comp.*, vol. II, pp. 289-90).

¹⁵*Œuv. comp.*, vol. III, p. 370.

of the Parnassians. If they had any quarrel with him, it was because of his persistent subjectivity, as a result of which everything in the outer world appealed to him only in terms of himself. But in his mastery of the intricacies of versification, his wealth of imagery, and his imaginative power, he was the perfect artist to whom all the Parnassians went to school. In our study of this group, we shall have ample occasion to note how the various facets of Hugo's genius were reflected in their work. In Leconte de Lisle, it was the broad sweep of his imagination that attracted; in Banville, it was his artistry; in Coppée, it was his humanitarianism. Whichever way one turns in the lyric poetry of France after 1850, one usually finds oneself looking down a highway or a byway which had already been trodden by Victor Hugo.

One of the most characteristic of the verse-collections of Hugo is his *l'Art d'être grand-père*. Here we have him at once the poet of the delights of the *foyer*, in his verses to his grand-children, Jeanne and Georges Hugo, and the "grandfather" of humanity, holding familiar converse with the Almighty himself and expounding his notions as to the proper conduct of the universe.¹⁶ This demagogical note is entirely absent from the work of another poet who was a product of the Romantic æsthetic and, like Hugo, affected the fatidical strain—Alfred de Vigny. As a member of the two *cénacles*, contributor to the organ of the first of them, *la Muse française*, author of a tragedy *Othello* (1829), adapted from Shakespeare, and of *Cinq-Mars*, a novel centering upon Richelieu and his crushing of one of the most formidable of the conspiracies hatched against him at the court of Louis XIII, Vigny was among the bulwarks of French Romanticism. As a poet, however, he broke sharply with the traditions of the school, as manifested in the work of Lamartine and Hugo, and opposed to their flamboyant subjectivity a philosophical *hauteur* which was to find important admirers and imitators among the

¹⁶Vide "Tout pardonner c'est trop" in *l'Art d'être grand-père* (*Œuv. comp.*, vol. XIII, pp. 135-38).

Parnassians. Vigny's poetic baggage is extremely slight; it is contained in two collections, *Poèmes* (first published in 1822 and re-issued in augmented form in 1826 under the title of *Poèmes anciens et modernes*) and *les Destinés*, (published posthumously in 1863). Of the poems contained in the first collection, "la Dryade" and "Symétha" are dated 1815, and "le Bain d'une dame romaine" 1817; here, doubtless, is Vigny's justification for the statement, in a preface, that "dans cette route d'innovations, l'auteur se mit en marche bien jeune, mais le premier."¹⁷ Sainte-Beuve, however, in his insistence that Vigny's first work was imitative of André Chénier,¹⁸ maintains, without much show of justice, it would seem, that Vigny wilfully antedated these poems.¹⁹ It is scarcely necessary to give the poet the lie in the matter of these relatively unimportant compositions, for such poems as "la fille de Jephté," written in 1820, unmistakably prove that Vigny, like both Lamartine and Hugo, felt, during his formative period, the influence of Chénier, as well as that of Byron. But the greatest poems of the first collection, "Moïse" and "Eloa" bear the stamp of truly individual genius and were never surpassed by their author; indeed, in only two or three of the poems of the posthumous volume—"la Colère de Samson," "le Mont des Oliviers," "la Maison du Berger"—may they be said to have been equalled. Beginning as an out-and-out Romanticist, Vigny's metaphysical penchant soon lifted him above the sentimental vaporings and the frenzied exaggerations of the generation of 1830 into the empyrean of solitary contemplation and gave his poems a solid philosophical content which was conspicuously wanting in most of his colleagues of the *cénacles*.

¹⁷A. de Vigny: *Poèmes* (*Œuv. comp.*, vol. II, Paris, Conard, 1914, p. 2).

¹⁸It will be remembered that Chénier's poems, though written long before, were first published in 1819.

¹⁹Vide *Nouveaux lundis* (Paris, Lévy, 1883, vol. VI, p. 404). For a refutation of this theory, see E. Dupuy: *Alfred de Vigny, la vie et l'œuvre* (Paris, Hachette, 1913, pp. 91-105).

Vigny, thus, broke with the Romanticists and struck out for himself. The same, it will be seen, was true of Alfred de Musset, the same was true of Gautier. Maxime du Camp has called attention to this singular phenomenon: "De tous ceux," he asserts in his biography of Gautier,²⁰ "qui sont entrés dans la famille dont Goethe, Schiller, Chateaubriand, Byron ont été les ancêtres, dont Victor Hugo a été le père, ceux-là seuls sont supérieurs qui ont fait bande à part." Those who persisted in their Romanticism were the freaks, the persons of small talent, those who had begun as imitators and had never outgrown this rôle. This fact must be borne in mind in any attempt at an appreciation of that group of so-called "neo-Romanticists" who were to take their place in literary history under the sobriquet of "les Parnassiens."

The greatest of Vigny's poems, then, are distinguished by a Biblical grandeur and a philosophical profundity that entirely compensate for their numerical paucity. "Moïse" depicts the suffering of the great Jewish law-giver, appointed by God to be His spokesman to the Chosen People and crushed by the onus of this distinction. His anguished plea, four times repeated, "Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!" goes unheeded; he has lived "puissant et solitaire," and his death is unseen by men.

"Marchant vers la terre promise
Josué s'avavançait pensif et pâissant,
Car il était déjà l'élu du Tout-Puissant."²¹

"Eloa" is the story, Miltonic in conception and structure, of an angel, born of a tear of Jesus, who is touched with pity for the fallen Satan and remains by his side in the infernal regions to which he had been banished. "Le Mont des Oliviers," a companion-piece, in tone, to "Moïse," shows Jesus in the grip of a gnawing doubt as to the efficacy of his

²⁰Published in the series of *les Grands écrivains français* (Paris, Hachette, 1895, p. 184).

²¹*Poésies* (Paris, Delagrave, p. 10).

mission. "La Maison du berger" is a lamentation upon the cold impassibility of Nature.

"Ne me laisse jamais seul avec la Nature,
Car je la connais trop pour n'en pas avoir peur."²²

Vigny's answer to the vanity of human wishes and human achievements, to mankind's debasement of art, to the doubts which permeate the meditations of the elect, is a proud stoicism, a haughty disdain which was partly innate in the man—a descendant of an aristocratic line whose nobility he was prone to exaggerate—partly the result of bitter disappointments in the principal ambitions that motivated his life—love, military glory, literary renown. If God refuses to offer man some reason for the evil, the suffering which dominate his life,

"Si le Ciel nous laissa comme un monde avorté,
Le juste opposera le dédain à l'absence
Et ne répondra plus que par un froid silence
Au silence éternel de la Divinité."²³

If Nature is "froide," is "l'impassible théâtre que ne peut remuer les pieds de ses acteurs," and boasts:

"Je roule avec dédain, sans voir et sans attendre,
A côté des fourmis les populations,"²⁴

man must take his answer from the admonition of the wolf:

²²*Ibid.*, p. 195.

²³The concluding verses of "le Mont des Oliviers." The bulk of the poem was first published in the *Revue des deux mondes* for June 1, 1843. The quoted lines appear in a stanza called "le Silence" appended to the poem on April 2, 1862 (vide *Poèmes*, p. 230).

²⁴From "la Maison du berger" (*Poèmes*, pp. 191, 189, and 190, respectively).

"Si tu peux, fais que ton âme arrive,
 A force de rester studieuse et pensive,
 Jusqu'à ce haut degré de stoïque fierté
 Où naissant dans les bois, j'ai tout d'abord monté.
 Gémir, pleurer, prier est également lâche.
 Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche,
 Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler.
 Puis après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler."²⁵

Vigny, thus, has embodied the theories of Marcus Aurelius in a group of poems exalted by a lofty seriousness which differentiates them from the elegiac emotionality of much of contemporaneous poetry. The philosopher in him, however, was doubled by the artist. In his feeling for the euphony of words, in the vigor and aptness of his figures of speech, and his fondness for the symbol, Vigny was a master-poet. His art was to him sacred, inviolable; like Flaubert, he wrote but little, not because, as has sometimes been urged, he was lazy or sterile, but because he refused to put his hand to anything he considered beneath his dignity. To be sure, his poems are of uneven merit, and only in a few of them did he attain to the heights; but his striving was always to soar aloft, far above the pettily busy ant-hill of mankind. A poem must be, for him, a finished work of art. "Un livre tel que je le conçois," he has said, "doit être composé, sculpté, doré, taillé, fini, limé et poli comme une statue de marbre de Paros."²⁶ In the dignified impersonality of Vigny, as well as in his æsthetics, the Parnassians were to find a well-spring of inspiration.

The poet who, both in his life and in his writings, best exemplified the ardors and the extravagances of the Romantic movement was Alfred de Musset. Born in Paris in 1810 and thus only seventeen at the time of the organization of the Hugonian *cénacle*, Musset was introduced into the group and soon became the spoiled child, the *enfant terrible*, of the Romanticists. A combination in character

²⁵"La Mort du loup" (*Poèmes*, p. 218).

²⁶Quoted by Cassagne, in *la Théorie de l'art pour l'art* (Paris, Hachette, 1906, p. 117).

of the ardent, brooding Werther, the haughty, melancholic René, and the cynical Byron, Musset was early attacked by the *mal du siècle* which he has depicted in his *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, and never recovered from the malady. He was truly the Byronic bad boy of French poetry. Sainte-Beuve, in a *causerie* written after the death of Musset,²⁷ gives a vivid picture of the enthusiasm with which the members of the *cénacle* listened to the infant prodigy's reading of such of his early poems as "Mardoche" (written in 1829) and others later published under the caption of *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* (1830). But with the triumph of the Romantic movement achieved as a result of the battle of *Hernani*,²⁸ the *cénacle*, deprived of a *raison d'être*, gradually disintegrated. Musset was one of the first to leave the fold; he was anxious for more worlds to conquer. His search brought him into the path of George Sand, and the consequence was a passionate, tempestuous *liaison* which, in less than a year, left him sick both in body and at heart and made of him an elegiac poet equal, in his most exalted moments, to the Lamartine of "le Lac." The seven years following the termination of his love-affair (1834-1841) witnessed the production of his finest lyric poetry. From this time on, he sank deeper and deeper into the slough of idle debauchery, so that his last years, lightened only by the success of his plays and by his election to the French Academy in 1852, saw him dragging out a life of misery, a drug-addict and a prematurely old man. His death, in 1857, found him poor, friendless, forgotten by all save a few of those who had known the brilliance of his *début*.

Musset's creative energy, like Hugo's and Vigny's, found an outlet, not only in poetry, but also in the drama and the novel. In everything he wrote, however, he was primarily the lyric poet. His one novel of importance, the *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, was a highly-colored record of his

²⁷*Causeries du lundi* (Paris, Garnier, n.d., vol. XIII, pp. 364-75, dated May 11, 1857).

²⁸The *première* of *Hernani* took place on February 25, 1830.

affair with George Sand, and fairly quivers with the amorous abandon which had marked the poet's self-surrender. His principal dramas—*les Caprices de Marianne* (1833), *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* (1834)—though written in prose, are thoroughly poetic both in subject-matter and in treatment, and are penetrated with the sadness of one who has known the tragic consequences of love. The tremulous sensitiveness of the poet is given freest rein in the greatest of his lyric poems: the four dialogues known as the *Nights*—"Nuit de mai," "Nuit de décembre" (1835), "Nuit d'août" (1836), "Nuit d'octobre" (1837)—the "Lettre à Lamartine" (1836), and "Souvenir" (1841), a poem highly reminiscent of "le Lac." Here Musset shows a close spiritual and emotional kinship with the Lamartine of the *Méditations poétiques*. Both poets had been profoundly influenced by Byron; both were gifted with a rare spontaneity of expression that lends their compositions an air, almost, of improvisation; both wrote in the heat of their emotions, with little care for the technical finish of their work, and, consequently, with frequent negligence of the rules of versification and of syntax. In the "Nuit de décembre," Musset describes "Un jeune homme vêtu de noir Qui me ressemblait comme un frère," who had dogged his steps throughout life and in the end reveals the fact that he is "la Solitude" and invites the poet: "Quand tu seras dans la douleur, Viens à moi sans inquiétude."²⁹ In the other three *Nuits*, the poet bewails to his Muse the tragedy that had marred his life. The Muse takes him to task and urges him to rise above his suffering, to shake off the lethargy to which he had become a slave.

²⁹*Poésies nouvelles* (Paris, Flammarion, n.d., pp. 70-78).

"L'herbe que je voulais arracher de ce lieu,
C'est ton oisiveté; ta douleur est à Dieu.
Quel que soit le souci que ta jeunesse endure,
Laisse-la s'élargir, cette sainte blessure
Que les noirs séraphins t'ont faite au fond du cœur;
Rien ne nous rend si grands qu'une grande douleur.
Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots."³⁰

Then follows the celebrated simile of the pelican, too well known to bear quoting. The same note prevails in the "Nuit d'octobre." The Muse declares:

"Le coup dont tu te plains t'a préservé peut-être,
Enfant; c'est par là que ton cœur s'est ouvert.
L'homme est un apprenti, la douleur est ton maître.
Et nul ne se connaît tant qu'il n'a pas souffert.
C'est une dure loi mais une loi suprême."³¹

The "Lettre à Lamartine," opening with a lengthy tribute to Byron, compares Musset's tragic love with that of Lamartine.

"Tel, lorsque abandonné d'une infidèle amante,
Pour la première fois j'ai connu la douleur,
Transpercé tout à coup d'une flèche sanglante,
Seul, je me suis assis dans la nuit de mon cœur.
Ce n'est pas au bord d'un lac au flot limpide,
Ni sur l'herbe fleurie au penchant des coteaux;
Mes yeux noyés de pleurs ne voyaient que le vide,
Mes sanglots étouffés n'éveillaient point d'échos.
C'était dans une rue obscure et tortueuse
De cet immense égout qu'on appelle Paris."³²

The "Souvenir," written in the same strophic form as "le Lac," blesses the healing power of time, "bonté consolatrice," for:

"Je n'aurais jamais cru que l'on pût tant souffrir
D'une telle blessure, et que sa cicatrice
Fût si douce à sentir."

³⁰"La Nuit de mai" (*Poésies nouvelles*, p. 55). The italics are inserted.

³¹*Poésies nouvelles*, p. 124. The italics are inserted.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 83.

The poem, one of the finest elegies in the language, concludes on a lofty note:

“Je me dis seulement: ‘A cette heure, en ce lieu,
Un jour, je fus aimé, j’aimais, elle était belle.
J’enfouis ce trésor dans mon âme immortelle
Et je l’emporte à Dieu.”³³

Musset, thus, was a highly personal writer, who saw life through the prism of his own emotions and who was concerned solely with the literary expression of his own passions. Not for him the humanitarian interests of Hugo; not for him the metaphysical inquiries of Vigny. Life, for him, had only two aspects: the flame of desire and the ashes of satiety. This constant harping upon the single note of self, combined with the technical shoddiness of much of his verse, caused Musset to fall into disrepute with the poets of the following generation. Lamartine, after having begun in this personal strain, soon moved to the vatic conception of art which Hugo always held; Vigny’s laments upon the harshness of fate were voiced in poems of a cosmic sweep. The Parnassians, arriving upon the stage of French literature at about the middle of the century, proposed to slough off the exaggerated sentimentality of Lamartine and Musset, and aimed at “la conservation, parmi les éléments dont se composait le Romantisme, du principe de l’indépendance de l’art.”³⁴ This principle they were to find most clearly expressed and most perfectly realized in the work of the last of the great Romantic poets—Théophile Gautier.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 206–13.

³⁴Cassagne, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOPHILE GAUTIER AND "L'ART POUR L'ART"

It has already been seen that the Romantic movement in France was brought to a head by the efforts of two *cénacles*—that of Nodier and that of Hugo. These groups differed from one another in at least two striking respects; in the first place, the Arsenal coterie was, to put it mildly, at least tepidly classical; in the second place, the "*cénacle* de Joseph Delorme"¹ included in its personnel not only men of letters, but painters, engravers, and sculptors as well, a fact which recalls the Pre-Raphaelite school in England. Indeed, if we are to believe Gautier's dramatic story of the event, the triumph of *Hernani* was made possible by the presence at the theatre of a large number of art-students who had been recruited in advance for service in the cause.² Especially were the younger men of the Hugo *cénacle* students of one or another of the plastic arts. This phenomenon is most significant for an appreciation of the striking change to be observed in the Romantic movement after 1830. Whereas Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, and Musset were tacitly contending for the independence of art and the interdependence of the arts, the younger Romanticists made these concepts the "Law and the Prophets" of the movement. The "transposition d'art" became the vogue, so that poets set about writing "pastels" and artists painting "sonnets." In other words, art looked upon itself as an independent entity and almost completely divorced itself from life. Here we have, in a nutshell, the theory of "l'art pour l'art," art for its own sake, the notion which was to actuate most of the poetry of the Parnassians.

¹So called because of the title of Sainte-Beuve's first volume *Vie, poésies, et pensées de Joseph Delorme* (Paris, 1829). Sainte-Beuve was on terms of close friendship with Hugo and his wife.

²Vide the chapter on the *première* of *Hernani* in Gautier's *Histoire du Romantisme* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1911).

The man who was, perhaps more than any other single individual, directly responsible for the enunciation and the practice of the idea of "l'art pour l'art" was Théophile Gautier. Born in 1811, Gautier early heard the call of the plastic arts and entered the studio of the painter Rioult. Together with his fellow—"rapins," he was keenly alive to the volcanic rumblings perceptible in the realm of literature, and when he was summoned by his schoolmate, the ill-starred Gérard de Nerval, to stand by as one of the warriors in the *Hernani* battle, he joyously assented. The evening of the *première* of this drama marked the turning-point in Gautier's life. In order to make sure of attracting the attention of the *bourgeois* who might be expected to attempt to howl down so flamboyantly anti-classical a work as Hugo's play, and thus to serve as a rallying-point for the soldiers of the new school, Gautier himself designed, and then had prepared, a costume—the most daring element of which was a pink waist-coat—which earned him immediate and lasting notoriety. A long time afterwards, Maxime du Camp, a warm friend of Gautier who was later to be one of his biographers, asked him whether it was true that he had become famous as a young man. Gautier replied, in a tone of ironic indifference: "Oui, à cause de mon gilet."³ The poet himself never completely recovered from the thrill of this occasion, and his description of the *première* throws a most interesting side-light upon the great achievement of "mil huit cent trente." The *Hernani* battle ended in a complete triumph for the Romanticists, and henceforth Gautier was the devoted slave of Hugo and determined to follow in his foot-steps as a *littérateur*.

In his *Histoire du romantisme*, Gautier devotes individual chapters to the outstanding figures among the younger adjuncts of the Romantic movement—Gérard de Nerval, Pétrus Borel, Philothée O'Neddy (an anagram of his real name, Théophile Dondey), Célestin Nanteuil, Jules Vabre (called "le compagnon miraculeux")—a band of freaks

³Vide du Camp: *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

who believed, or affected to believe, that eccentricity is the badge of genius, and most of whom, with the exception of the unhappy Gérard, possessing eccentricity alone, soon passed into the limbo of oblivion. The interesting fact about this group, however, is that they were painters and sculptors as well as poets. "Cette immixtion de l'art dans la poésie," says Gautier in the *Histoire du romantisme*, "a été un des signes caractéristiques de la nouvelle école."⁴ A quarter of a century later, Victor Hugo, in a poem to M. Froment-Meurice, was to declare:

"Le poète est ciseleur,
Le ciseleur est poète."⁵

Herein lies the explanation for the "sculpturalness" of the poetry of Gautier and his contemporaries. His own *Emaux et camées*, Louis Bouilhet's *Festons et astragales*, Théodore de Banville's *les Cariatides*—these titles of three important volumes published at about the middle of the century give ample evidence of the current conception of the relation of poetry to the plastic arts. As late as 1872, Banville could still asseverate: "La poésie est à la fois musique, statuaire, peinture, éloquence; elle doit charmer l'oreille, enchanter l'esprit, représenter les sons, imiter les couleurs, rendre les objets visibles, et exciter en nous les mouvements qu'il lui plaît d'y produire; aussi est-elle le seul art complet, nécessaire, et qui contienne tous les autres."⁶

Goaded on by the success of *Hernani*, Gautier devoted himself heart and soul to the composition of poetry. A slender volume of *Poésies*, published in July, 1830, was completely lost sight of in the hubbub of the Orleanist revolution; and so the poems were reprinted, with notable additions, in 1832, under the title of *Albertus*. This volume is, in some respects, far more significant for its preface, written in October, 1832, than for the verses it contained. Here

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁵*Les Contemplations* (1856—*Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, p. 73).

⁶*Petit traité de poésie française* (Paris, Lemerre, 1872, p. 9).

we have Gautier, at his very first appearance as man of letters, an avowed exponent of art for its own sake, an outspoken opponent of utilitarian art. The preface opens with the statement that its author is totally uninterested in politics; "il n'est ni rouge, ni blanc, ni même tricolore; il n'est rien, il ne s'aperçoit des révolutions que lorsque les balles cassent les vitres" (a reference to the revolution of July, 1830). He realizes full well that "the time is inopportune for the publication of a volume of verse, but he considers it "une œuvre pie et méritoire par la prose qui court, qu'une œuvre d'art et de fantaisie où l'on ne fait aucun appel aux passions mauvaises." And then he takes up the question of "useful art"; "Quant aux utilitaires, utopistes, économistes, saint-simonistes, et autres qui lui demanderont à quoi cela rime,—il répondra: Le premier vers rime avec le second quand la rime n'est pas mauvaise, et ainsi de suite. A quoi cela sert-il?—Cela sert à être beau.—N'est-ce pas assez? Comme les fleurs, comme les parfums, comme les oiseaux, comme tout ce que l'homme n'a pu détourner et dépraver à son usage. *En général, dès qu'une chose devient utile, elle cesse d'être belle.*" Elle rentre dans la vie positive, de poésie elle devient prose, de libre, esclave.—Tout l'art est là. *L'art, c'est la liberté.*"—La peinture, la sculpture, la musique ne servent absolument à rien.—Les objets dont on a le moins besoin sont ceux qui charment le plus." This theorem Gautier was to develop at much greater length in the celebrated preface to his no less celebrated novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), and it remained the basic creed of his entire literary career.

In his magistral work, *la Théorie de l'art pour l'art*,⁸ Cassagne has carefully studied the origins of this concept in French literature. He quotes the statement of Janet,

⁷Italics inserted.

⁸Cassagne quotes, (p. 38) the following passage from an article by Cousin in the *Revue des deux mondes*: "Il faut comprendre et aimer la morale pour la morale, la religion pour la religion, l'art pour l'art." But this article was written in 1845, thirteen years after Gautier's first preface, and can have no bearing upon the question of priority.

one of the biographers of the philosopher, Victor Cousin, that "on doit à Cousin la théorie de l'indépendance de l'art qui ne doit être un instrument de sensualité, ni auxiliaire exclusif de la morale et de la religion."⁹ The opposing concept of "l'art utile" was preached by the political and economic radicals as well as by the great army of *bourgeois* writers. Lamennais maintained: "L'art pour l'art est une absurdité." Such important playwrights as Dumas fils and Augier were outspoken champions of the "théâtre utile." Maxime du Camp, the author of a volume of verse entitled *Chants modernes* (1855) ridiculed the notion that "la forme seule est belle" and called upon poets to concern themselves with scientific and industrial progress.¹⁰ Even Hugo, in his *William Shakespeare* (1864), maintained that his art had always been "social," and denied vigorously the authorship of the theory of "art for art's sake." "L'art pour l'art," he declares, "peut être beau, mais l'art pour le progrès est plus beau encore."¹¹ But Gautier clung unswervingly to his love of art for its own sake. In 1856, he collaborated in the publication of a periodical called *l'Artiste* which stood on the platform of the autonomy of art: "L'art pour nous," affirmed *l'Artiste*, "n'est pas le moyen, mais le but; tout artiste qui se propose autre chose que le beau n'est pas un artiste à nos yeux; nous n'avons jamais pu comprendre la séparation de l'idée et de la forme. . . . Une belle forme est une belle idée." This conception of art—unsocial, unmoral, unreligious, anti-*bourgeois*—was anathema to the "great reading public" of the middle of the century and, on numerous occasions, it ran afoul of the State; the appearance of Flaubert's

⁹*Esquisse d'une philosophie*, Book VIII, Chap. 3—quoted by Cassagne, p. 39.

¹⁰It was absurd, therefore, that the publishers of the *Grands écrivains français* series should have called upon du Camp to prepare the biography of Gautier. Du Camp does his very best (pp. 177–84) to prove that Gautier's interest in form did not exceed his concern for content.

¹¹Quoted by Cassagne, *op. cit.*, p. 91. All the quotations in this paragraph are from Cassagne, pp. 51, 137.

Madame Bovary in the *Revue de Paris* brought on a governmental indictment of author and editors; the publication of Baudelaire's *les Fleurs du mal*¹² cost the poet a fine of three hundred francs. With all this, however, there was no "school" of "l'art pour l'art." The theory was vociferously proclaimed at Gautier's Thursday dinners at his Neuilly home, where he received, among others, Flaubert, Banville, the brothers Goncourt, and Baudelaire; Flaubert's celebrated "dîners Magny" included many admirers of the theory; and it was ardently championed at the *salon* of the charming Mme. Sabatier, for a brief while the mistress of Baudelaire, by Gautier, Flaubert, Louis Bouilhet, and the Goncourts. But all these men wrote as individual artists, and Gautier was not by any means the least independent of them. The group that may perhaps lay the strongest claim to having practiced the theory most concertededly and most consistently was that of the Parnassians, and the derivation of this group from Gautier will, in the following chapters of this study, be definitely established.

To return to the poetry of Gautier. The 1832 volume of *Poésies* was a typical "maiden" effort, interesting less for what it contained than for what it promised. Gautier here revealed the sensitiveness to the beauties of nature and to the emotions of youth which were characteristic of the period. More significant is his expression of his indebtedness to the older leaders of the Romantic movement. In "A mon ami Eugène de N.," he speaks of

"Nos auteurs chéris, Victor et Sainte-Beuve,
Aigles audacieux, qui d'une route neuve
Et d'obstacles semée ont tenté les hasards,
Malgré les coups de bec de mille geais criards,
D'Alfred de Vigny . . .
Et d'Alfred de Musset et d'Antoni Deschamps."

Then follows a significant passage:

¹²The volume was dedicated to Gautier.

"Des vieux qu'un siècle ingrat en s'avançant oublie,
Guillaume de Lorris . . .
Le bon Alain Chartier, Rutebeuf le conteur,

Maître Clément Marot, madame Marguerite,

Villon, et Rabelais, cet Homère moqueur."¹³

The pre-classical poets, neglected for nearly three centuries, were again bidding for attention, and were to receive their full meed only at the hands of the Parnassians. The artistic duality of Gautier is also revealed in this poem to Eugène de N.

"Quand nous aurons assez causé littérature,
Nous changerons de texte et parlerons peinture;
Je te dirai comment Rioult, mon maître, fait
Un tableau qui, je crois, sera d'un grand effet."

Then, in their turn, come Perugino, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Veronese, Titian, Michael Angelo, Annibale Caracci, Corregio, Rembrandt. Though he had abandoned the *atelier* of the painter, he always felt at liberty to visit it when the spirit so moved.

Gautier's first work of real significance was a narrative poem—*Albertus, ou l'âme et le péché: légende théologique*—in the ultra-romantic vein, wherein is manifest the influence of *Faust*, Part One, the works of Byron, and the early poems of Musset. Albertus was a painter torn between his love for his own art and his interest in poetry and music; in his choice of subject-matter for his pictures, he is a true Romanticist, for his studio contains, among others, canvasses of Bürger's Lenore, of Macbeth and the sorceresses, of the children of Lara, and of Marguerite (Faust's Gretchen) at her prayers. Albertus succumbs to the charms of an entrancing woman who is actually only a hideous witch in disguise and who, after a session of most frenetic cohabitation, regains, in the very arms of her

¹³*Poésies complètes* (2 vols., Paris, Charpentier, 1884-85; vol. I, pp. 68-71).

lover, her original form. The painter is carried off, on a broom-handle, to a witches' sabbath plainly a mere reproduction of the Faustian Walpurgisnacht, and in the morning is found dead on the Appian Way. The poem is, from beginning to end, derivative; indeed, it might be an interesting pastime to enumerate the passages borrowed directly from other authors. Gautier's apostrophe to love: "Amour, joie et fléau du monde,"¹⁴ can hardly be less than an unabashed lifting from Musset's "Don Paez,"¹⁵ where we find the verse: "Amour, fléau du monde, exécration folie." Likewise, the line: "Comme emparadisés dans les bras l'un de l'autre,"¹⁶ is a word-for-word translation of Milton's "Imparadised in one another's arms."¹⁷ Despite the slightly hyperbolical assertion with which Gautier begins the concluding stanza of his poem: "Ce poème homérique et sans égal au monde," *Albertus* is interesting solely as a typical sample of the Byronic influence in France and for the light it casts upon the poet's ever-present attachment to painting, his first love among the arts.

This predilection is revealed in numerous poems contained in later collections of Gautier's verse. It even assumes a tone of bitterness in such poems as "la Diva," where we read:

Pourquoi, découragé par vos divins tableaux,
Ai-je, enfant paresseux, jeté là mes pinceaux,
Et pris pour vous fixer le crayon du poète?

Pourquoi, lassé trop tôt dans une heure de doute,
Peinture bien-aimée, ai-je quitté ta route?
Que peuvent tous nos vers pour rendre la beauté?

Ah! combien je regrette et comme je déplore
De ne plus être peintre."¹⁸

¹⁴Stanza XLVII (*Poésies complètes*, vol. I, p. 146).

¹⁵*Premières poésies*, p. 19. The poem is undated but it is printed between one dated 1828 and another 1829, and must have been written in one or the other of these years, as it is only the fifth poem in the volume. *Albertus*, on the other hand, is dated 1831.

¹⁶Stanza LV.

¹⁷*Paradise Lost*, Book IV, line 506.

¹⁸*Poésies diverses* (*Poésies complètes*, 1833-38, vol. I, p. 229).

The poem "A un jeune tribun" is a veritable tirade against the "useful" arts and *bourgeois* morality. We read:

"Il est dans la nature, il est de belles choses,
Des rossignols oisifs, de paresseuses roses,
Des poètes rêveurs et des musiciens
Qui s'inquiètent peu d'être bons citoyens,
Qui vivent au hasard et n'ont d'autre maxime,
Sinon que tout est bon pourvu qu'on ait la rime;

Qui s'enivrent de vers comme d'autres de vin
Et qui ne trouvent pas que l'art soit creux et vain.

Qui donc dira cela, que toute chose belle,
Femme, musique, ou fleur, ne porte pas en elle
Et son engeignement et sa moralité?"¹⁹

It would be supererogatory to call attention to the similarity of this passage with some of the oft-quoted lines of Keats. In "Pensées de minuit,"²⁰ Gautier bewails the fact that the high enthusiasm of his youth had been replaced by a skeptical disillusionment due, at least in part, to his readings in the literature of Romanticism.

"J'ai lu Werther, René, son frère d'alliance;
Ces livres, vrais poisons du coeur,
Qui déflorent la vie et nous dégoûtent d'elle,
Dont chaque mot vous porte une atteinte mortelle;
Byron et son Don Juan moqueur."

A final point of interest in the first volume of Gautier's *Poésies complètes* is worthy of at least passing notice. A great many of the poems of the volume are capped by quotations drawn from a host of poets, native as well as foreign. A large number of these, naturally enough, are from the works of Gautier's fellow-Romanticists of France, England, and Germany: Musset, Joseph Delorme (Sainte-Beuve), Gérard de Nerval, Ulric Guttinguer, Pétrus Borel, Byron, Goldsmith, Bürger; but just as many, and this is significant, are taken from the pre-classical French poets.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 246-52.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 256-61.

Virtually the entire Pléiade is thus honored, as are the *Roman de la Rose*, Alain Chartier, Villon, du Bartas, and Desportes. Gautier, for one, was convinced of the æsthetic kinship of the Romanticists with the French poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In the year 1836, Gautier, for monetary reasons exclusively, took a step which resulted in his enslavement for the remaining thirty-six years of his life and which he never ceased lamenting. He became the *feuilletoniste* of the Paris journal, *la Presse*, and later passed, in this same capacity, to *le Moniteur universel* and *le Journal officiel*, and was rescued from this cordially hated hack-work, to which he clung only because it was the sole possible *gagne-pain* for one to whom any other profession but that of letters was unthinkable, only by his death in 1872. Week-in, week-out, Gautier must needs have his article—chiefly dramatic reviews and art-criticisms—ready for the greedy maws of the printing-presses. In a feverish chase after “copy,” he took trips to Spain, Italy, Constantinople, and Russia, all of which were recounted in four volumes of *Voyages—en Espagne, en Italie, en Russie, à l’Orient*. Whatever leisure he was able to wrest from his detested vocation he applied to the composition of poetry. His tour of Spain found poetic echo in a slender book, *España* (1845); his finest verses were collected into a volume upon which his immortality as a poet will rest: *Emaux et camées* (1852). The poems contained in the second volume of the *Poésies complètes*²¹ are a continuous *lamento* against the fate that had chained him to the Ixion-wheel of the feuilleton. In “Sur un album,”²² he complains:

“Ma poésie est morte, et je ne sais plus rien
Sinon que tout est laid, sinon que rien n’est bien.”

And:

²¹Which includes all his poems written after 1838, with the exception of those comprising the volume of *Emaux et camées*.

²²*Poésies diverses, 1838-45 (Poésies complètes, vol. II, pp. 53-54).*

"O poètes divins, je ne suis plus des vôtres!
On m'a fait une niche, où je veille tapi,
Dans le bas du journal comme un dogue accroupi."

In "Dans la sierra,"²³ he exclaims:

"J'aime d'un fol amour les monts fiers et sublimes!

Ils ne rapportent rien et ne sont pas utiles;
Ils n'ont que leur beauté, je le sais, c'est bien peu."

His admiration for pure poetry, in the person of Victor Hugo, is set down in "A Jean Duseigneur, Sculpteur:"²⁴

"Tout est grêle et mesquin dans cette époque étroite
Où Victor Hugo, seul, porte sa tête droite
Et crève les plafonds de son crâne géant."

Of the remaining poems in the volume, very few are deserving of attention. *La Comédie de la mort*²⁵ (1838) is a macabre composition that may not have been without influence upon Baudelaire; in it, the poet seeks, after the fashion of Ecclesiastes, to discover the meaning of life. This he does by consulting, in turn, Faust, the ardent seeker after knowledge; Don Juan, whose life was an uninterrupted quest for the ideal love; and Napoleon, who had staked his all upon the achievement of military glory. The poet concludes with Solomon that "all is vanity" and looks forward longingly to the release afforded by death. Finally, the attention of the reader should be called, at this point, to a sonnet entitled "L'Impassible,"²⁶ to which reference will be made in the detailing of the history of the Parnassian group.

Gautier, it has been demonstrated, believed with firm conviction that art is its own justification, and that art

²³*Ibid.*, *España*, p. 133.

²⁴*Ibid.*, *Poésies nouvelles, poésies inédites, et poésies posthumes*, 1831-72, p. 167.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 3-49.

²⁶*Ibid.*, *Poésies nouvelles*, etc., 1831-72, p. 240. "L'Impassible" is dated Chamarande, July, 1866.

which is employed to serve as handmaiden to morals, ethics, religion, sociology, is thereby prostituted. This theory took its most concrete form in his *Emaux et camées*,²⁷ the volume of verse which might, without much risk of the reproach of fatuity, have inspired the poet to declare with Horace: "Exegi monumentum aere perennius." In the prefatory poem, Gautier compares himself to Goethe, who, amidst the fracas of the imperial wars, had composed the *West-östlicher Divan*; similarly, he (Gautier) had written the verses of which his volume was composed during the stormy days of the *coup d'état* of 1851.

"Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan
Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées
Moi, j'ai fait *Emaux et camées*."

In this collection of poems, Gautier had scrapped all the remnants of the Romantic folly and pseudo-philosophy evident in *Albertus* and *la Comédie de la mort*; he has become the complete master of his tools, and he has used these tools for the creation of poems which, for perfection of artistic finish, have seldom been equaled. The poems are, truly, "enamels and cameos,"—clear-cut gems, exquisitely painted miniatures. For subject-matter Gautier has drawn upon all the beautiful, ostensibly useless things his eyes might anywhere have encountered: the hands or the azure eyes of a woman, the first smile of spring, a pink gown, the smoke issuing from a peasant's hut, fountains, tea-roses, clouds, flowers, turtle-doves. "Transpositions d'art" abound; the "Poème de la femme" has as its subtitle "Marbre de Paros"; there are a "Symphonie en blanc majeur," "Contralto," "Lied." Chinese porcelains, Spanish guitars, music-boxes, butterflies, Russian furs, myosotis-flowers, dragon-flies, jewels—of such dainty ephemera has Gautier carved and chiseled his poetic Tanagra-marbles. The noteworthiness of this achievement becomes even more amazing when it is recalled that all the poems in the volume, with

²⁷Paris, Charpentier, 1884.

the exception of the last three, are written in the same metrical form, and that one of the simplest conceivable, the octosyllabic quatrain, with alternating rhyme. The concluding poem of the volume, "l'Art," is a pæan to the durability of art; the final stanzas of the poem read:

"Tout passe.—L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité.
Le buste
Survit à la cité.

Et la médaille austère
Que trouve un laboureur
Sous terre
Révèle un empereur.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent
Mais les vers souverains
Demeurent
Plus fort que les airains.

Sculpte, lime, cisèle;
Que ton rêve flottant
Se scelle
Dans le bloc résistant."

This doctrine was a far cry from the Romanticism of 1830; not for a Lamartine or a Musset, a Hugo or a Vigny was the cold, patient kneading of impalpable nothings into immortal works of art. Indeed, Romanticism, long before its official interment in the failure of Hugo's last play, had become a house divided against itself. Out of the schism sprang the Parnassians. The generation that had come to life just before or during the stirring decade from 1820 to 1830 (Flaubert, Bouilhet, Fromentin, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville) had carried all through its youth a profound veneration for the giants of that epoch.²⁸ The link between the two generations was Théophile Gautier, the perfect poet of *Emaux et camées*. Though loyal all his life to the

²⁸An interesting account of this veneration is to be found in Maxime du Camp's *Souvenirs littéraires* (2 vols., Paris, Hachette, 1906—vol. I, chaps. 4 and 5).

Romantic attachments of his youth, Gautier had traveled his own road. "Comme Alfred de Musset," says Maxime du Camp,²⁹ "il entendait garder son indépendance, et il la garda jusqu'à la dernière heure, conservant son individualité intacte et ne se laissant pas entamer, malgré la dévotion qu'il professait pour Victor Hugo." And again: "Il resta ce qu'il voulut être, le chevalier errant de la littérature nouvelle, sans autre attache que l'admiration pour le général en chef et la sympathie pour le corps d'armée; mais il marcha isolé, n'accepta aucun joug, pas même celui de Victor Hugo."³⁰ It was under the ægis of Gautier, the champion of poetry as a "pure art" comparable to music, painting, and sculpture, that the Parnassians were to launch their artistic strivings upon an indifferent world.

²⁹*Théophile Gautier*, p. 129.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 130.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARNASSUS IN FRANCE

Romanticism had freed literature of the fetters that had so long shackled it, and now men no longer blushed to pour out their souls in verse and to give these verses to be read by others. In the hands of Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, and Musset, lyric poetry again became in France one of the dominant *genres*; in those of Gautier it became a "thing of beauty" rather than of passion or of metaphysical contemplation. The stage was set for an efflorescence of lyric poetry such as France has seldom known; this efflorescence we are now prepared to study in its successive stages and to follow to its decline.

Gautier's *Emaux et camées* was published in 1852; fourteen years later the first *Parnasse contemporain: Recueil de vers nouveaux* issued from the press. The three intervening lustra were marked by epoch-making achievements in the realm of French literature: Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes antiques* appeared in 1852, as did *la Dame aux Camélias* of Dumas fils; the year 1857 saw the publication of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Baudelaire's *les Fleurs du mal*, and Théodore de Banville's *Odes funambulesques*. In the field of the novel and the drama, the pendulum swung from the extreme of Romanticism to that of Realism, a swing that was the resultant of numerous forces: the unprecedented advances made in the various sciences, the rise to power of the moneyed *bourgeoisie* with its emphasis upon the value of physical possessions as opposed to artistic creations; briefly, the positivism of which Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer were the philosophical mouthpieces. Poetry, though recognizing the encroachment of the materialistic spirit and in a measure succumbing to it, was yet determined to maintain its independence; and it was the Parnassian group that stood forth as the defenders of Erato in her "struggle for existence." Let us, then, acquaint ourselves with the history of *le Parnasse contemporain*.

In the year 1859, there came up to Paris from Bordeaux a Jewish banker, Tibulle Mendès, his Catholic wife, and an eighteen-year-old son who very appropriately bore the name of Catulle. This young man enjoyed a most liberal allowance, which he seemed eager to squander, for he soon hit upon the idea—hardly an original one for provincials in Paris—of founding a review. He was not slow in carrying out his idea and the result was what he himself has styled “le premier des journaux parnassiens.”¹ The periodical flaunted the name of *la Revue fantaisiste*, and it specialized in printing the poems, sketches and fantasies of a group of young writers who were distinguished “par la témérité des opinions et par l’impertinence aussi de l’attitude.” The review was interested in only two things, “la Poésie et la Joie.” It was favored with the high patronage of Gautier, Banville, and Baudelaire, and some of its contributors later carved their names in large letters upon the history of French poetry. At the *bureau* of *la Revue fantaisiste*, there would gather of an afternoon, Banville, Charles Asselineau, Philoxène Boyer, Baudelaire, Albert Glatigny, and numerous others. One of the contributors to the *Revue* was a young musician who was struggling bitterly for recognition and whose *Tannhäuser* had ben hissed off the stage of the *Opéra* in Paris—Richard Wagner. “Presque tous les poètes d’alors vinrent à *la Revue fantaisiste*,” Mendès tells us, and he claims the credit for having helped to bring to light such talents as Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Sully Prudhomme, and Léon Cladel. A one-act play of his own, *le Roman d’une nuit*, which Mendès published in his review, brought the author-editor a fine of five hundred francs and one month’s imprisonment on the charge of “immorality.” The fine was too heavy for the purse of *la Revue fantaisiste*, the strings of which had apparently been cut by Mendès’ father, who was at first

¹Mendès: *la Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, deuxième conférence, from which the quotations on the following pages are taken, except where otherwise noted.

none too sympathetic towards his son's literary bohemianism, and the periodical expired. It was succeeded, as mouthpiece of some of its contributors, by such journals as *la Revue française* and *la Revue du progrès*, short-lived and otherwise unimportant, while the better-known *Revue de Paris* printed the verses of such of the future Parnassians as Heredia, Verlaine, Cladel, and others.

During these early years of the sixties, a group of poets, among whom were Banville, Sully Prudhomme, Léon Dierx, Heredia, and Armand Silvestre, had been meeting regularly, every Saturday, at the home of Leconte de Lisle in the boulevard des Invalides. Simultaneously, Mendès, in his handsome apartment in the rue de Douai, was conducting his own *salon*, with such poets as Coppée, Léon Valade, and Albert Méral, as his guests. The two groups were brought together by the Hellenist Louis Ménard, and placed themselves at once under the tutelage of Leconte de Lisle. The meetings of this amalgated *cénacle* were devoted to free discussions of philosophy, æsthetics, and especially literature; in the words of Emile Zola, the group "se cloîtrait dans un coin pour faire de la poésie une véritable religion."² Not infrequently, one of the assembled poets would read a composition of his own. Leconte de Lisle was a severe judge, but he was appreciative of any type of genius, provided it was animated by "la vénération de l'art, le dédain des succès faciles." It was in this group that the idea of *le Parnasse contemporain* originated.

Another element had to be assimilated, however, before Parnassus could definitely be transported to Paris. The members of the Leconte de Lisle-Mendès band, impecunious poets who were rich in nothing but leisure, gathered also, at more or less regular intervals, at the home of Théodore de Banville and at the *salons* of the poetess, Mme. Nina de Callias, the princess Mathilde, and the Marquise de Ricard.³

²*Documents littéraires* (Paris, Charpentier, 1881, chapter on "les Poètes contemporains").

³For a discussion of the Parnassian *salons*, vide the present author's article, "The Parnassians at Play," which is to appear in the *Romanic Review* early in 1930.

The last-named, a woman of culture and intelligence, had a son, Louix-Xavier de Ricard, who, like Mendès, was casting his generous allowance into the insatiable maw of a review of which he was, of course, the editor—a handsomely made up and consequently expensive weekly entitled *l'Art*, the second of the "journaux parnassiens." Mendès, foreseeing the early demise of this periodical, prevailed upon Ricard to convert it into a magazine devoted exclusively to poetry, to be edited jointly by the two men.

The result was *le Parnasse contemporain: Recueil de vers nouveaux*.⁴ Mendès takes the credit (though others have disputed it) for the coining of the name, the idea for which he received from collections of verse like Théophile de Viau's *le Parnasse satirique*. Five issues of the new review appeared at irregular intervals in 1865, and it would soon have gone the way of most literary periodicals had not the group been introduced by a rather erratic violinist, Ernest Boutier, to Alphonse Lemerre who undertook its publication. Lemerre's offices in the passage Choiseul at once became the rendezvous of the contributors to the review, who had almost spontaneously come to be known as the *Parnassiens*,⁵ and who filled the room which had been assigned to them by the publisher with their boisterous criticisms and recitations of their verses. In a series of triolets called "l'Entresol du Parnasse," Gabriel Marc,⁶ a cousin and disciple of Théodore de Banville, brings together, in Lemerre's shop, Leconte de Lisle, Banville, Mendès, Heredia, Theuriet, Coppée, Glatigny, Sully Prudhomme, Valade, Mérat, Dierx, d'Hervilly, Armand Renaud, Cazalis, Lafenestre, and Armand Silvestre. These men, and a score of others, were the authors of the poems selected by Mendès

⁴Paris, Lemerre, 1866.

⁵The authorship of this name has been attributed to Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly who, in a series of articles called "Médaillonets" (printed in *le Nain jaune* in November, 1866) bitterly attacked the thirty-seven contributors to *le Parnasse contemporain*.

⁶A contributor to the second and third series of the *Parnasse*. The "Entresol du Parnasse" was written in 1870 and published in Marc's volume, *Sonnets parisiens* (1875).

and Ricard for the eighteen numbers of the review, which were, in 1866, bound and issued as a single volume bearing the name of the periodical. And thus was achieved the transmigration of Mount Parnassus.

Alphonse Lemerre was, apparently, a shrewd business man. It is difficult to suppose that, in offering to assume the costs and responsibility of the publication of *le Parnasse contemporain*, he did so merely as a Maecenas to a group of struggling poets whose work might otherwise never have been seen in print.⁷ Be that as it may, *le Parnasse contemporain* evidently proved a sound financial investment. For, three years later, in 1869, Lemerre prepared for publication a second *Parnasse contemporain*: *Recueil de vers nouveaux*, containing characteristic verses of no less than fifty-six poets, among whom were practically all of the original thirty-seven. Mendès and Ricard had very little hand in the editing of this volume, which was assembled under the direction of Banville, and the actual publication of which was delayed until 1871, though the title-page bears the date of 1869; this *Recueil* was less representative of the Parnassians than had been its predecessor.⁸ Lemerre, by this time, was also the official publisher of the members of the group, whose individual volumes he was bringing out in rapid succession. These ventures must have brought the entrepreneur ample returns; for, in 1876, he issued *le Parnasse contemporain*: *Recueil de vers nouveaux*, number

⁷Cf. on this point, Remy de Gourmont: *Promenades littéraires*, vol. V (Paris, Mercure de France, 1913, p. 49).

⁸In the *Nouvelles littéraires* for October 10, 1925, Marcel Coulon publishes an interesting letter, hitherto "inédite," from Arthur Rimbaud to Banville, dated May 24, 1870. Rimbaud, then only fifteen years old and later to become the boon companion of Verlaine and the deity of the Symbolists, sent Banville three poems with the following request: "Si ces vers trouvaient place au *Parnasse contemporain*?—Je ne suis pas connu, qu'importe?" Rimbaud had been encouraged in this request by the fact that the *Parnasse* contained poems not only by the masters, but also by poets of second and third rank, and some even by totally unknown writers. But Rimbaud's contributions were not included in the second *Parnasse contemporain*.

three. The poets honored by inclusion now counted sixty-three; the comparative homogeneity of the first collection had entirely disappeared, and, though most of the Leconte de Lisle-Banville-Ricard enthusiasts were to be found within the covers of the third *Recueil*, they were now rubbing shoulders with numerous interlopers, some of whom were outspokenly hostile to the Leconte de Lisle and Banvillean æsthetics. In a word, the once proud *Parnasse contemporain* had degenerated into a mere anthology. There was no fourth *Recueil*.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the three volumes of *le Parnasse contemporain* represent a phenomenon of the utmost importance in the history of French lyric poetry. In its pages are to be found representative verses of virtually every poet of any significance in the third quarter of the century, with the single exception of Victor Hugo. That Hugo is not to be found between its covers may have been due, at least in part, to the fact that, at the time of the preparation of the first two *Recueils*, he was still enjoying his exile on the island of Guernsey, and that, in 1876, when the third *Recueil* appeared, the editors feared to approach him on the subject of inclusion in a mere anthology. Be that as it may, if Hugo was not actually a collaborator of the *Parnasse contemporain*, his spirit undoubtedly hovered over those who were responsible for its inception. Champions of the cultivation of art in an age rapidly growing more and more materialistic, the original Parnassians thought with veneration of the great rebel of the Romantic *cénacle*. And, with Hugo ever in mind, they sounded the call to all the poets of the day who truly worshipped at the altar of poesy to rally about the standard. The call was answered by a host of men and women, most of them overflowing with the enthusiasm of youth, and some of them to take their places, before long, in the very forefront of contemporaneous poetry. Many of the poems which were printed in the *Parnasse* had previously, to be sure, appeared in volumes published by their authors; but an even greater number here saw the light of day in print for the first time.

Not a few of the younger Parnassians may be said to have made their literary *début* in the pages of the *Parnasse*, to have been "brought out" by one or another of the three *Recueils*.

A warning must be sounded at this point, however, against the error into which many critics and literary historians have fallen, largely through inadequate acquaintance with the actual contents of the three *Recueils*. These writers are constantly speaking of the "Parnassian school" and its "doctrine," and passing judgments which indicate that they look upon the Parnassians as an entity after the fashion of the sixteenth-century *Pléiade*. Nothing could be farther from the truth; and the following chapters will offer ample demonstration of the heterogeneity of the group from the points of view of influence, native endowment, temperament, philosophy of life, and literary technique. Let us, for the moment, listen to Catulle Mendès on the subject. Mendès begins the first of the four lectures which he delivered in Brussels on the theme of the "*légende du Parnasse contemporain*" with the assertion that the Parnassians had not given themselves this name but had been thus dubbed by adverse critics after the publication of their first collection of "*vers nouveaux*." Even before the appearance of the 1866 *Recueil*, the group had been honored with several sobriquets: because of their concern with style and external form, they had been called by some *les Stylistes*, by others *les Formistes*; as a result of their connection with the *Revue fantaisiste*, they had been named *les Fantaisistes*; and a poem from the pen of Glatigny, entitled "*l'Impassible*," earned them, Mendès claims, the nickname of *les Impassibles*.⁹ As a matter of fact, the poets of the French Parnassus were generally considered "*grotesques*", and it

⁹Contained in *les Vignes folles (Poésies complètes, Paris, Lemerre, 1879, p. 43)*. Mendès incorrectly states that this poem was dedicated to Gautier, whereas it was actually inscribed to Baudelaire. Mendès' error may have arisen from the fact that Gautier, too, was the author of a sonnet called "*l'Impassible*," which will be quoted and discussed later in this chapter.

was not long before the word "Parnassien" became a term of denigration in the mouth of the *bourgeois*. Mendès then insists, with all the conviction at his command, that the Parnassians were merely a "groupe" and not an "école." "Attirés," he says, "les uns vers les autres par leur commun amour de l'art, unis dans le respect des maîtres et dans une égale foi en l'avenir, ils ne prétendaient en aucune façon s'engager à suivre une voie unique. . . . Aucun mot d'ordre, aucun chef, toutes les personnalités absolument libres."¹⁰ Some of the poets were interested in antiquity—religious, historical, or mythological—others in the various aspects of contemporaneous life. The motto of the group might have been: "Fais ce que tu pourras, pourvu que tu le fasses avec un religieux respect de la langue et du rythme." And in another account of the aims and achievements of the Parnassians,¹¹ Mendès sums up this diversity of outlook and of technique in the following sentence: "Je ne pense pas qu'à aucune époque d'aucune littérature des poètes du même moment aient été à la fois plus unis de cœur et plus différents par l'idée et par l'expression." The *Parnasse contemporain* was not to be the organ of any one group, but was intended to be, and was, eclectic in its nature; it proposed to serve the same function for poetry that the *Salon* does for painting.¹²

Before entering upon our study of the contents of the three volumes of the *Parnasse contemporain*, we may do well to cite the opinions of two writers who were, by temperament, diametrically opposed to the Parnassians—Henri-Frédéric Amiel and Emile Zola. Amiel, the Swiss professor who might have been one of the foremost literary critics of his day if his overmastering self-consciousness had not lamed his mind and his hand whenever he set out to write for publication and whose undeniable talents were

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, pp. 19 et seq.

¹¹*Le Mouvement poétique français de 1867 à 1900* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1903, p. 114).

¹²Vide J. Huret: *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris, Charpentier, 1891, p. 289).

to be revealed only in his posthumously published *Journal intime*, was himself a poet, but one whose aspirations, as he himself sadly confessed, far exceeded his gifts. His reactions to the Parnassians were definitely hostile; on December 9, 1877, a year after the publication of the third *Parnasse contemporain*, he made the following pronouncement in his diary:¹³ "Les Parnassiens sculptent des urnes d'agate et d'onyx, mais que contiennent ces urnes? de la cendre. Ce qui manque, c'est le sentiment vrai, c'est le sérieux, c'est la sincérité et le pathétique, c'est l'âme et la vie morale. Je m'efforce en vain d'aimer cette manière d'entendre la poésie. Le talent est prestigieux, mais le fond est vide. L'imagination veut tout remplacer. On trouve des métaphores, des rimes, de la musique, de la couleur; on ne trouve pas l'homme. Cette poésie factice peut enchanter à vingt ans; mais qu'en peut-on faire à cinquante? Elle me fait songer à Pergame, à Alexandrie, aux époques de la décadence, où la beauté de la forme cachait l'indigence de la pensée et l'épuisement du cœur. J'éprouve avec intensité la répugnance que cette poétique inspire aux braves gens. On dirait qu'elle n'a souci de plaire qu'aux blasés, aux raffinés, aux corrompus, et qu'elle ignore la vie saine, les mœurs régulières, les affections pures, le travail rangé, l'honnêteté et le devoir. C'est une affectation, et parce que c'est une affectation, l'école est frappée de stérilité. Le lecteur désire dans le poète mieux qu'un saltimbanque de la rime et un piqueur de vers; il veut trouver en lui un peintre de la vie, un être qui pense, qui aime, qui a de la conscience, de la passion, du repentir."

Zola, the self-professed founder and law-giver of the Naturalist school, had much the same fault to find with the Parnassians, but stressed their "uselessness" more than their "unmorality."¹⁴ He first crucifies Gautier as the inventor of the theory of "l'art pour l'art." All of Gautier's written and spoken work, says Zola, "a été une gymnastique

¹³Vol. II, pp. 243-44.

¹⁴*Documents littéraires*—vide the chapter on Gautier and that on "les Poètes contemporains."

étourdissante sur le terrain du paradoxe." "Il écrivait comme on peint, avec le seul souci des lignes et des couleurs. . . . Il a poussé du premier coup le romantisme à la perfection classique. . . . Le romantisme se fige dans l'art pour l'art qui est sa forme classique. . . . Dès qu'une littérature ne vit plus que par les mots, elle meurt. Avec Gautier, le romantisme . . . en est à sa phase parfaite, . . . qui annonce l'écroulement. Il n'y a plus d'idée dessous, plus de base humaine, plus de logique ni de vérité. L'école n'aura bientôt qu'à se faisander avec les Parnassiens et à mourir de sa belle mort. . . . C'est un romantisme . . . devenant dogmatique, se glaçant pour imposer une formule de beauté parfaite et éternelle. . . . La versification ainsi entendue devient un art délicat, très compliquée et très charmant, qui se suffit à lui-même en dehors de l'idée." Zola was indignant over the fact that the Parnassians stopped up their eyes and their ears "pour ne pas être troublés par le milieu vivant qui les entourait. . . . Tous reconnaissaient la souveraineté de la forme, tous juraient de bannir les émotions humaines de leurs œuvres. . . . Il fallait être sculptural, sidéral, se placer en dehors des temps et de l'histoire, mettre son génie à trouver des rimes riches et à aligner des hémistiches aussi durs et aussi éclatants que le diamant." But, like Amiel, Zola is compelled to admit the surpassing wizardry of the Parnassians as artists. "Jamais, à aucune époque," he finds himself avowing, "on n'a rimé avec une largeur plus grande. La langue française, sous leurs doigts, a été travaillée comme une matière précieuse." Ironically enough, Mendès, the historiographer of the French Parnassus, returned Zola's compliment by declaring that the Médan group¹⁵ were Parnassians and that *Nana* was "la création

¹⁵Which met weekly during the winter at Zola's home in Paris and in summer at his country-home at Médan, on the Seine, not far from Versailles, and included Guy de Maupassant, J. K. Huysmans, Léon Hennique, Paul Alexis, and Henri Céard. In 1880, this group published a volume of stories under the caption of *les Soirées de Médan*. Maupassant's contribution, "Boule de suif," was easily the best story of the volume and the success enjoyed by this, his first published

d'un poète"¹⁶ rather than the depiction of a phase of life as seen by a Naturalist.

The very enemies, thus, of the Parnassians were compelled to make grudging admission of the fact that, whatever else they may have done or neglected to do, they were, for the most part, animated by an exceedingly lofty ideal. This ideal, borrowed from Gautier and practiced assiduously by the leaders of the group, may be styled, for our purposes, Parnassianism; it was never formulated into a "doctrine," and it represented an attitude rather than a technique. In its broadest sense, it was, briefly stated, a constant striving after perfection of form, with the elimination, as far as was humanly possible, of the personal element; only the first half of this definition, however, might be said to hold true for all the Parnassians, for the Baudelairean wing of the group, at least, was as introspective, in its own peculiar way, as were ever the most rabid of the Romanticists. Preoccupation with form and objectivity was not confined to the Parnassians, properly so called; they were manifest in the works of the great novelists and dramatists of the period, in those, for instance, of Flaubert and Alexandre Dumas fils. The critic Brunetière, therefore, states, with some show of justice, that, if the birth of Parnassianism at all bears dating, the year to which this event might best be attributed would be 1857, which saw the publication of *Madame Bovary*, *les Fleurs du mal*, Dumas' *la Question d'argent*, and the first edition of the complete works of both Leconte de Lisle and of Théodore de Banville.¹⁷ The grouping of the names of these two poets and of Baudelaire is most significant for our purpose; for it was under their guidance and inspiration that the new generation was attempting the difficult task of clambering beyond the foothills of Parnassus. Describing this tripartite influence, Gautier asserts that some

fictional effort, set him on the path which was to lead him to the heights of fame.

¹⁶*Legende*, p. 146.

¹⁷*Histoire et littérature* (Paris, Lévy, 1885—essay on "le Parnasse contemporain," vol. II, pp. 207-33).

of the Parnassians imitated the "sérénité impassible" of Leconte de Lisle, others the "ampleur harmonique" of Banville, and still others the "âpre concentration" of Baudelaire, "chacun," however, "avec son accent propre qui se mêle à la note empruntée."¹⁸ The Parnassians' concern for form was so intense as frequently to degenerate into a maniac clownery and more than occasionally to make for banality, if not even for nullity, of content. By their mass effort, the group lent to the theory of "art for art's sake" appropriated from Gautier a dignity it might otherwise have lacked. For those who think, with Brunetière¹⁹ that form is the chief justification of poetry, the Parnassians performed a signal service in the cause of French lyric verse; but the groups who denominated themselves Symbolists and Decadents, "transfuges du *Parnasse contemporain*," rebelled violently against this form-idolatry and "ont revendiqué l'ancienne liberté du poète."²⁰ Thus, the Parnassians found themselves before long in the position of revolutionaries who have substituted their autocracy for the one they have been at such pains to annihilate, and whose despotism, equal to that of the deposed tyrants, hastens their own overthrow.

Hardly had the first issues of *le Parnasse contemporain* appeared than an outburst of violent carpings was leveled at the heads of its collaborators. The irascible Barbey d'Aurevilly was one of the bitterest of the critics; in a series of "Médaillonets" contributed to *le Nain jaune* during the month of November, 1866, he fired a fusillade at each of the thirty-seven poets of the group.²¹ The attack at

¹⁸*Le Progrès de la poésie française depuis 1830*, which forms a suite to his *Histoire du Romantisme* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1911). Gautier also adds, as a fourth pattern for imitation, the "farouche grandeur de la dernière manière d'Hugo." Modesty forbade any mention of the group's indebtedness to his own poetry.

¹⁹*Loc. cit.*

²⁰*Nouvelles questions de critique* (Paris, Lévy, 1898—essay on "le Mouvement littéraire au XIX^e siècle," p. 310).

²¹He had, in the same journal, in 1864, executed, in a similar manner, the members of the French Academy in a series of *Médaillons de l'Académie française*. . . . Some of the facts of this paragraph

times took on the guise of burlesque. Thus, a band of young poets—either because they had not been invited to contribute to *le Parnasse contemporain* or for more genuinely artistic reasons—composed, early in December, 1866, a collection of parodies under the general title of *le Parnassiculet contemporain*.²² This otherwise totally unimportant volume almost provoked a duel between the leader of the hostile group, Paul Arène, and Catulle Mendès, and called forth replies in kind from various Parnassians. In April, 1867, there appeared, for example, a periodical called *la Gazette rimée*, published by Lemerre, a satirical review, the expenses of which were borne by one of the lesser Parnassians, Robert Luzarche, and the principal contributors to which were Paul Verlaine and Anatole France. Other periodicals created to defend the group against its vilifiers were *la Parodie*, which dragged out a brief existence in 1869; *la Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, issued at about the same time; *la Revue du monde nouveau*, in 1874; *le Siècle littéraire*, in 1875, and, in the same year, perhaps the most important of all, *la République des lettres*. The greater number of the contributors to these periodicals were Parnassians; and *la République des lettres*, owned and directed by Catulle Mendès, the original “fantaisiste,” enjoyed comparative success, as it lasted for three years. With his usual sympathy for youthful writers, irrespective of literary leanings, Mendès published in this review not only the poems of his colleagues, but the compositions of such men as the members of Zola’s Médan group, æsthetically the very antipodes of the Parnassians. Thus, Maupassant, Huysmans, Léon Hennique, and Paul Alexis appeared in its pages; and, most surprising of all, when the periodical which was printing Zola’s *l’Assommoir* in instalments suspended its publication because of the

are taken from M. Ibrovac’s exhaustive work on José-Maria de Heredia (Paris, *les Presses françaises*, 1923).

²²Paris, *Librairie centrale*, 1867. No less a personage than Alphonse Daudet, then twenty-six, collaborated in the composition of this series of parodies.

furor it was creating, Mendès, realizing the true merits of the work, welcomed the Naturalist leader into his fold and carried the novel to its completion in *la République des lettres*. In this way, Mendès confuted the charge (made, among numerous others, by Zola himself) that the Parnassians were a closed corporation; moreover, as early as 1871, the same enterprising lover of the arts had inaugurated a series of "matinées de poésie ancienne et moderne" in the *théâtre de l'Ambigu*, the prime purpose of which was to acquaint the populace of Paris with the poetic strivings of these so-called impassible artists. By 1880, the Parnassians had earned an almost legendary position in the history of mid-nineteenth-century French literature; but the rumblings of revolt that had been faintly making themselves heard were soon to burst forth in the Symbolist-Decadent reaction which, for the next two decades, almost completely crowded their literary progenitors off the stage of French lyric poetry.

We are now prepared to offer ourselves a bird's-eye view of the contents of the three volumes of *le Parnasse contemporain*. The first *Recueil*, as we have seen, was published in 1866 and contained the contributions of thirty-seven poets. That the work was undertaken under the ægis of Gautier is demonstrated by the fact that the volume opens with a group of five poems from his pen. The attachment of the Parnassians to the Romanticists is evidenced by the inclusion of two members of the earlier Romantic *cénacle*, Emile Deschamps, one of the founders of *la Muse française*, and his brother Antoni. Arsène Houssaye, a hanger-on of Romanticism in the days of its decline and for seven years director of the Comédie française, is represented by a far larger group of poems than his talents deserved. With the publications of compositions of these four poets, the Parnassians seemed to feel that they had fulfilled their obligations to the parent body, for the overwhelming majority of the contributors were young men and women, many of them in their early twenties in 1866. Most of these budding geniuses went

to school to one or another of the three poets whose names have already been linked, Leconte de Lisle, Banville, and Baudelaire; these men and their immediate disciples play so important a rôle in the development of French lyric poetry of the latter half of the nineteenth century that they merit consideration in independent chapters. Banville, who follows Gautier in the *Recueil*, is represented by only one poem, "l'Exil des Dieux," an elegy on the disappearance of the pagan gods and all that their names connote, which may be regarded as the keynote of the volume. Time and again, the strain of sadness and of ennui, of hatred for the *bourgeois* and his new gods, is to be heard in the verses of the Parnassians. Aphrodite, as spokesman for the gods in Banville's poem, laments:²³

"... Nous errons vaincus parmi les fondrières.

Homme, vil meurtrier des dieux, es-tu content?

Tout est dit. Ne va plus boire la poésie
 Dans l'eau vive! les dieux enivrés d'ambroisie
 S'en vont et meurent, mais tu vas agoniser.
 Ce doux enivrement des êtres, ce baiser
 Des choses, qui toujours voltigeaient sur tes lèvres,
 Ce grand courant de joie et d'amour, tu t'en sèvres!"

Then follow five sonnets by José-Maria de Heredia, the last of which, "Prométhée," echoes Banville's plaint in the words, "car il n'est plus de Dieux."²⁴ Heredia's master, Leconte de Lisle, appears next, with a group of nine characteristic poems, in the last of which, "la Dernière vision," the poet prognosticates the end of mankind and of all its illusions:

"Et ce sera la Nuit aveugle, la grande Ombre
 Informe, dans son vide et sa stérilité,
 L'abîme pacifique où gît la vanité
 De ce qui fut le temps, et l'espace, et le nombre."²⁵

²³*Parnasse contemporain*, vol. I, pp. 10-11.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 32.

The Leconte de Lislean ideal is most succinctly expressed, in this volume, by a sonnet called "Nirvana," the first of a series of five "Sonnetts mystiques" by Louis Ménéard who, it will be later shown, had pronounced literary and philosophical affiliations with the master. The sonnet bears quoting in its entirety.²⁶

"L'universel désir guette comme une proie
Le troupeau des vivants; tous viennent tour à tour
A sa flamme brûler leurs ailes, comme autour
D'une lampe l'essaim des phalènes tournoie.

Heureux qui, sans regrets, sans espoir, sans amour,
Tranquille et connaissant le fond de toute joie,
Marche en paix dans la droite et véritable voie,
Dédaigneux de la vie et des plaisirs d'un jour!

Néant divin, je suis plein du dégoût des choses;
Las de l'illusion et des métempsycoses,
J'implore ton sommeil sans rêve; absorbe-moi,

Lien des trois mondes, source et fin des existences,
Seul vrai, seul immobile au sein des apparences,
Tout est dans toi, tout sort de toi, tout rentre en toi!"

The remaining sonnets of Ménéard reveal the same weariness with life. "Thébaïde" concludes with the statement that the poet has found, in place of "le ciel rêvé dans l'âpre solitude," only "la morne impuissance et l'incurable ennui."²⁷ And again, in "la Sirène":

"Mais moi, je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai voulu naître;
J'ai mal fait, je me suis trompé, je devrais bien
M'en aller de ce monde où je n'espère rien."²⁸

This ennui is, of course, a heritage of the Romantic era and is to be observed in the verses of a goodly majority of the Parnassians. One of the youngest of them, François

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 35.

Coppée, who was later, because of his predilection for subjects drawn from the life of the "submerged tenth" to earn for himself the title of "le poète des humbles," voices the same languorous boredom in the four poems by which he is represented in the *Recueil*.

The third of the triumvirs who held sway over the younger Parnassians, Charles Baudelaire, is represented in the first *Parnasse contemporain* by a group of no less than fifteen poems printed under the caption of *Nouvelles fleurs du mal*. The first of these is an "Epigraphe pour un livre condamné" in which the "peaceful and bucolic reader" is urged: "Jette ce livre saturnien, Orgiaque et mélancolique." The poet whose *Fleurs du mal* had stirred up a scandal similar to that of *Madame Bovary* appeals: "Lis-moi pour apprendre à m'aimer" and closes with the cry: "Plains-moi . . . sinon, je te maudis."²⁹ All the poems are marked by the magic workmanship of their creator and the temptation is almost overpowering to quote freely from them, inasmuch as they exemplify Baudelaire's individual peculiarities. In "Madrigal triste," the poet, with his characteristic perversity, pictures a love strikingly different from that of a Lamartine or a Musset.

"Je t'aime surtout quand la joie
S'enfuit de ton front terrassé;
Quand ton coeur dans l'horreur se noie;
Quand sur ton présent se déploie
Le nuage affreux du passé."³⁰

As long as she will not have felt "l'étreinte de l'irrésistible Dégout," his love will be unable to declare: "Je suis ton égale, ô mon Roi." In "Recueillement," the poet bids his grief be calm: "Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche";³¹ and in "le Gouffre," he paints the "multi-form nightmare of fear" which pervades all of life:

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 67.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 78.

"En haut, en bas, partout, la profondeur, la grève,
Le silence, l'espace affreux et captivant.

J'ai peur du sommeil comme on a peur d'un grand trou,
Tout plein de vague horreur, menant on ne sait où."³²

Here we have the Romantic longing known as the "mal du siècle" turned inside out and its hollow nothingness exposed.

Sully Prudhomme, one of the most important of the poets for whom the *Parnasse contemporain* was the "jumping-off point," contributed to the *Recueil* three poems, the first of which, "les Ecuries d'Augias," shows him already pre-occupied with the questions of justice and truth. A sonnet, "le Doute," also reveals the metaphysical penchant which was to make of him the philosophical poet of his day:

"La blanche Vérité dort au fond d'un grand puits.
Plus d'un fuit cet abîme ou n'y prend jamais garde;
Moi, par un sombre amour, tout seul je m'y hasarde,
J'y descends à travers la plus noire des nuits.

Et j'entraîne le câble aussi loin que je puis;
Or, je l'ai déroulé jusqu'au bout, je regarde,
Et, les bras étendus, la prunelle hagarde,
J'oscille sans rien voir ni rencontrer d'appuis.

Elle est là cependant, je l'entends qui respire,
Mais, pendule éternel que sa présence attire,
Je passe et je repasse et tâte l'ombre en vain.

Ne pourrai-je allonger cette corde flottante,
Ou remonter au jour dont la gaité me tente,
Et dois-je dans l'horreur me balancer sans fin?"³³

Another sonnet well worth citing is that with which Paul Verlaine opens a group of seven short poems. The æsthetics of the Leconte de Lisle Parnassians, whom Verlaine was soon to abandon to become the follower of Baudelaire and the divinity of the Decadents, is to be found succinctly stated in "Vers dorés":

³²*Ibid.*, p. 79.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 97.

"L'art ne veut point de pleurs et ne transige pas,
Voilà ma poétique en deux mots: elle est faite
De beaucoup de mépris pour l'homme et de combats
Contre l'amour criard et contre l'ennui bête.

Je sais qu'il faut souffrir pour monter à ce faite
Et que la côte est rude à regarder d'en bas.
Je le sais, et je sais aussi que maint poète
A trop étroit les reins ou les poumons trop gras.

Aussi ceux-là sont grands, en dépit de l'envie,
Qui, dans l'âpre bataille ayant vaincu la vie
Et s'étant affranchi du joug des passions,

Tandis que le rêveur végète comme un arbre
Et que s'agitent—tas plaintif—les nations,
Se recueillent dans un égoïsme de marbre."³⁴

The Baudelairean heritage is manifest in such poems as "Cauchemar" and "Dans les bois," where the poet trembles "à la façon d'un lâche," and the very brooks "font un bruit d'assassins."³⁵ "Mon rêve familier" paints the unknown woman whom the poet might love:

"Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,
Et pour sa voix lointaine et calme et grave, elle a
L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues."³⁶

This same statuesqueness is masterfully achieved in a brief water-scape, "Marine," which will be quoted in another chapter.

In a group of nine poems, Stéphane Mallarmé, the second of the outstanding disciples of Baudelaire, gives voice to a long cry of sterility and hopelessness. In "le Sonneur," the poet declares that he is weary unto death:

"J'ai beau tirer le câble à sonner l'idéal,

Mais, un jour, fatigué d'avoir enfin tiré,
O Satan, j'ôterai la pierre et me pendrai."³⁷

"L'Azur" opens with a stanza in the same strain;

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 163.

"De l'éternel Azur la sereine ironie
 Accable, belle indolemment comme les fleurs,
 Le poète impuissant qui maudit son génie
 A travers le désert stérile des Douleurs."³⁸

Life is ineffably wearisome. "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres," begins "Brise marine,"³⁹ and in the "Epilogue" to his group of contributions, the poet threatens to break with his past:

"Je veux délaïsser l'art vorace d'un pays
 Cruel"⁴⁰

It will be interesting to observe, in a later chapter, the turn taken by the genius of Verlaine and Mallarmé.

The score or more remaining contributors to the first *Parnasse contemporain* need not retain our attention much longer. Those who are interested in the statistics of the three *Recueils* will find, in an appendix to this volume, a complete list of all who were allotted space in the anthologies, together with indications as to the collection in which each appears and the number of poems each contributed. For the present, a word will suffice on the subject of a few of those whose names appear in the table of contents of the *Parnasse contemporain* and who merit at least passing attention. That the editors of the first *Recueil*, Catulle Mendès and Louis-Xavier de Ricard, were better organizers than poets is evident from the verses which they included as most characteristic of their talents. The very names of Mendès' contributions—"le Mystère du lotus," "Dialogue d'Yama et d'Yami," "l'Enfant Krichna," and "Kamadéva"—testify amply to the fact that the ebullient Catulle was paying Leconte de Lisle his usual compliment of imitation. The only point worthy of note in Ricard's nine poems is his use of a verse-form which he calls "sonnet estrambote" and which has three, instead of the usual

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 165.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 170.

two, tercets rhyming *aab ccb ddb* or *aab cbc bdd*. A poet of real power who will come in for serious consideration further on in our study is Léon Dierx, represented in the first *Recueil* by six poems. Finally, Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, later to become celebrated as the author of *Contes cruels* and other works in prose, began as a Parnassian, with three poems in the first *Recueil*. The collection is brought to a close with sonnets by seventeen poets including, in addition to virtually all those mentioned thus far in this chapter, Léon Valade, Albert Mérat, and Henri Cazalis, who also wrote under the pseudonym of Jean Lahor.

Let us now cast a rapid glance over the second and third volumes of the *Parnasse contemporain* in order to note their most significant features. It is the second *Recueil* that contains the sonnet called "l'Impassible" to which reference was made in the chapter on Gautier. This poem was written in 1866, too late for inclusion in the first *Parnasse* and is here quoted because of its possible connection with the point raised by Mendès as to why the Parnassians were also sometimes called *les Impassibles*:

"La Satiété dort au fond de vos grands yeux;
En eux, plus de désir, plus d'amour, plus d'envie;
Ils ont bu la lumière, ils ont tari la vie,
Comme une mer profonde où s'absorbent les cieux.

Sous leur bleu sombre, on lit le vaste ennui des Dieux,
Pour qui toute chimère est d'avance assouvie,
Et qui, sachant l'effet dont la cause est suivie,
Mélangent au présent l'avenir déjà vieux.

L'infini s'est fondu dans vos larges prunelles,
Et, devant ce miroir qui ne réfléchit rien,
L'Amour découragé s'assoit, fermant ses ailes.

Vous, cependant, avec un calme olympien,
Comme la Mnémosyne, à son socle accoudée,
Vous poursuivez, rêveuse, une impossible idée."⁴¹

⁴¹*Parnasse contemporain*, vol. II, p. 261.

Mendès, it will be remembered, declares that it is to Albert Glatigny's "l'Impassible" that the group owed this particular one of its many nicknames. Now Glatigny's poem has as little reference to a band of poets as does Gautier's sonnet, both clearly depicting the *hetaira* who has been disenchanted in her search for the ideal lover. As a matter of fact, there is little need to look to either of these poems for the origin of this sobriquet of the Parnassians, inasmuch as the adjective "impassible" had been applied to Leconte de Lisle soon after the appearance of his *Poèmes antiques* in 1852, and the epithet might readily have been transferred from the master to his disciples.

In this connection, it is of interest that Glatigny's "l'Impassible" was not published in any of the three *Recueils*, although four poems from his pen are included in the second *Parnasse*. This unusual personage, a strolling actor by profession and a poet by avocation, is the subject of the larger part of the first *conférence* of Mendès' *Légende*, in which the pseudo-historian exaggeratedly dates the birth of Parnassianism from his meeting with Glatigny in Paris in about 1860. Some attention will be given the picturesque career of this barnstorming histrion in our study of Théodore de Banville and his followers.

Leconte de Lisle and Banville are, of course, both to be found between the covers of the second and third *Recueils*; but the name of Baudelaire, who had come to his pitiful end in 1867, is not included. Leconte de Lisle is represented by a biblical poem, "Kaïn,"⁴² in the 1869 collection, and in that of 1876 by "Hiéronymus,"⁴³ the first part of what was to be an epic poem, in three parts, to be known as *l'Épopée du moine*. Banville's contribution to the second *Recueil* was a group of ten "ballades joyeuses"⁴⁴ and to the third a bouquet of "rondels

⁴²Spelled "Qaïn" in the edition of the *Poèmes barbares* (1862), in which it was first published.

⁴³Never completed. It was included under the name "Hiéronymus" in the *Poèmes tragiques* (1884).

⁴⁴Included in *Trente-six ballades joyeuses* (1875).

composés à la manière de Charles d'Orléans." Heredia's sole attempt at a poem *de longue haleine*, an epic of the conquest of Peru and its gold by Pizarro, entitled "la Détresse d'Atahualpa" never advanced beyond the prologue "les Conquérants de l'or," which is to be found in the second *Parnasse*; and in the third there is a group of twenty-five sonnets from the hand of this master sonneteer.⁴⁵ Another truncated composition in the second *Recueil* is Mallarmé's dramatic poem, *Hérodiade*, which he styles "fragment d'une étude scénique d'un Poème de Hérodiade."

Among the poets whose names appear for the first time in the second *Recueil* is a group of no less than five women: Nina de Callias, Louisa Siefert, Mme. Auguste Penquer, Mme. Blanchecotte,⁴⁶ and Louise Colet, more celebrated as the mistress of Flaubert than in her own right. But by far the most noteworthy of the *débutants* of this volume is Anatole France. In his early twenties at the time of the publication of the original *Parnasse*, France was carried away by the love of antiquity that animated the Leconte de Lisle *cénacle*, and the second *Recueil* contains two poems of his in the Biblical strain, while the third published the first part of his neo-pagan *les Noces corinthiennes*.⁴⁷ Anatole France, however, could not long endure the shackles of poetry, and he soon passed into the fields of fiction and criticism in which he won the laurels that made him universally recognized as the supreme French *prosateur* of his day.

Of the minor poets of the Parnassian group, at least four should be mentioned here: Léon Cladel, whom

⁴⁵The fragment and the sonnets were later published in *les Trophées* (1893).

⁴⁶Mme. Blanchecotte and one Mélanie Bourotte (who is represented in the third *Recueil*) were disciples of the erratic poet, Thalès Bernard, whose exaggerated self-esteem made him an enemy of Leconte de Lisle and kept him out of the Parnassian group. The two poetesses were humorously dubbed "Cotte et Rotte."

⁴⁷Published in its entirety, by Lemerre, in 1876. It had been preceded in 1873, by a volume entitled *Poèmes dorés*.

Mendès styles "un des plus grands lyriques du siècle,"⁴⁸ Armand Silvestre, Albert Mérat and Léon Valade. The two last-named were inseparable friends who shared Mendès' enforced poverty when the banker's dissatisfaction with his son's bohemian dilletantism had compelled him to endure the privations of the Latin Quarter garret, and they had later been presented by him to Leconte de Lisle and his disciples. Mérat earned for himself some slight renown as the poet of the environs of Paris, and it is these that he celebrates in a group of seven poems published in the second *Parnasse* under the name of *Hors des murs*. The contributions of Valade to the three *Recueils* are in the lofty strain of the poet conscious of the dignity of his calling and thirsty for a share in the universal beauty.

A word about a few of the contributors to one or another of the three *Recueils* who did not, properly speaking, belong in the fold, and we shall have concluded this rather dreary catalogue. Victor de Laprade (1812-1883) was a somewhat windily pompous poet whose cultivation of antiquity made him, in a sense, a predecessor of Leconte de Lisle, though he was never actually a member of the Parnassian group. Mme. Louise Ackermann (1813-1890) enjoyed some consideration as a philosophical poet. Paul Bourget, the foremost present-day exponent of the psychological novel in France, began as a poet, disciple of Anatole France and Leconte de Lisle. The celebrated critic, Sainte-Beuve, who entirely disclaimed poetry after the severance of his relations with the Romanticists (about 1840), has somehow or other crept into the second *Recueil* with one poem. Auguste Barbier (1805-1882), whose volume of political verse, *les Iambes* (1831) brought him momentary glory, was all but rescued from oblivion by the same *Recueil*; and Paul de Musset, shining in the light reflected by his brother, is represented in the anthology, as is Jean Aicard, later to become a staid member of the French Academy. Finally, Eugène Manuel and Armand Renaud, poets of the

⁴⁸Vide J. Huret, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

people like Coppée, are given places in the seats of the mighty.

The three volumes of the *Parnasse contemporain*, thus, are a rather amorphous congeries of verses from the pens of a varied assortment of lyric poets of every degree of endowment, from Gautier and Leconte de Lisle down to the veriest poetaster. It is significant, indeed, that the contributors to the third *Recueil* are listed in alphabetical order; this volume, at least, was looked upon as a mere anthology, whereas the other two collections had been edited with some view to presenting the work of poets animated largely by similar artistic ideals. What, then, is the importance of the three *Recueils*? Briefly, they may be said to offer us a cross-section of French lyric poetry of the third quarter of the last century which would scarcely be obtainable in any other manner. Here we see the *genre* in divers stages of growth, from the feeble Romanticism of the brothers Deschamps through the great neo-Romantics, the Parnassians properly so called, to the horde of poets who received at their hands their first training in the difficult task of Pegasus-taming and then, in many instances, turned their steeds along the new paths of Symbolism and Decadence. The *Parnasse contemporain* permits us, as it were, a glimpse into the poetic workshop of the middle of the century; here we see poets who have "arrived" extracting from previously-published volumes compositions to serve as stimulus to their disciples; here we observe the neophytes making their first faltering steps up the steep slopes of Parnassus. Many of the poems in the three *Recueils* are intrinsically precious, many others are worthless; all are representative. In keeping alive the flame of poetry at a time when scientific positivism was making its most serious inroads into art, *le Parnasse contemporain* performed an invaluable service, and is consequently, despite its obvious shortcomings, deserving of a generous chapter in any history of French lyric poetry. Virtually every poet of the succeeding generation underwent, positively or negatively, the influence of the Parnassians, just

as the dramatists who followed Scribe had all to reckon with that "carpenter of plays." Even the vers-librists, paradoxical though this may seem, are in their debt, if not for their technique, at least for their susceptibility to form and line and color in the manifestations of the objective world and for their feeling for the *nuances* of words. It will be the business of the remaining chapters to afford us life-size portraits of the principal Parnassians and their disciples, in order to complete the ensemble painting of which *le Parnasse contemporain* is but the preliminary sketch.

CHAPTER FIVE

LECONTE DE LISLE AND HIS DISCIPLES

"Je me rappelle," says José-Maria de Heredia,¹ the poet who was generally recognized as the favorite disciple of Leconte de Lisle, "avec quel plaisir nous nous rencontrions, boulevard des Invalides, chez notre grand ami fraternel, où nous allions le samedi, 'comme les Musulmans à la Mecque.' Il nous a appris à tous à faire les vers, et les conseils qu'il nous donnait, ce n'était pas du tout pour que nous fassions des vers comme les siens, il se mettait dans la peau de chacun. . . . Oui, nous devons tous le respecter, le vénérer, l'aimer comme il nous a aimés, d'une grande affection dévouée. . . . Pour nous tous, . . . ce grand poète a été un éducateur admirable, un maître excellent. Par son illustre exemple plus encore que par ses conseils, il nous a enseigné le respect de la noble langue française, l'amour désintéressé de la poésie. Nous lui devons la conscience de notre art. Aussi, tout ce que nous avons pu faire de bon doit-il être compté à l'actif de sa gloire."

With proper allowances for the fact that this statement was uttered by the cherished pupil of his revered master, it would seem to voice the feeling of the group of poets for whom the *salon* of Leconte de Lisle was the very hearthstone of poesy and who looked up to him for more than a generation as a true Olympian. This man, who descended in a straight line from the Romanticists through his undeniable affiliation with Chénier, Hugo, and Alfred de Vigny,² loomed larger in the history of French poetry of the third

¹Huret, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-11.

²E. Dupuy, in his critical appreciation of Alfred de Vigny, previously quoted, calls Leconte de Lisle Vigny's "disciple le plus hautain" (p. 191).

quarter of the nineteenth century than any other maker of verse with the exception of Victor Hugo and Baudelaire, and, both by precept and by example, left an indelible impression upon the minds and work of those who aspired to a place on the rugged summit of Parnassus.

Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle was a Creole and of noble extraction on both sides of his house. His father had settled in the Ile de Bourbon (also known as the Ile de la Réunion), a French possession off the east coast of Africa, where, in 1817, he had married the daughter of a family already established there, a niece of the eighteenth-century erotic poet, Evariste Parny, and the following year saw the birth of the future Parnassian. At the age of three, the child was brought to Brittany where, under the direction of his father's family, he was given his first schooling. After seven years, he was sent back to Bourbon, where he spent a full decade under the influence of the exotic beauties of the tropical island. Another five years in Brittany, then a period of travel in the Orient and a final two-year sojourn in Bourbon, and, in 1846, Leconte de Lisle settled definitively in Paris, which he was henceforth rarely to leave. Kindled by an ardent idealism, he threw himself eagerly into the humanitarian movements which hastened the revolution of 1848. Swiftly disillusioned, however, by the signal failure of this uprising to achieve any lasting results, he withdrew from active life, and from this time until his death lived in an "ivory tower" of literature almost as closely guarded as was that of Vigny. He had until now been supported by his father, who had acquired financial comfort in the slave trade, and it is significant that, in his humanitarian fervor, he was a strong advocate of the abolition of the inhuman traffic which was the mainstay of his family's existence. His attitude on this question precipitated a break with his father, who could not understand the poet's idealism and who was soon actually brought to ruin by the decision of the French government to abolish the slave-trade in its colonies. Leconte

de Lisle was thrown upon his own resources, and as these consisted solely of the poetic gifts which had early revealed themselves to him and which he was determined to cultivate, he was for long years to drag out a most precarious existence. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to his literary ideal, and, by collaboration in the editing of several liberal periodicals as well as by translations of Homer, Hesiod, and the Greek tragedians, he eked out a meagre livelihood. As a true poet and philosopher, however, he was content with little; and in times of greatest need, his friends delicately came to his rescue. Thus, in 1863, despite his avowed republicanism, his name was placed on the list of the pensioners of Napoleon the Third, a fact which, when later discovered, gave his enemies food for slander; and in 1872, when the downfall of the Empire had threatened the poet with absolute penury, François Coppée, one of the younger Parnassians, notwithstanding that his work was looked upon with some disfavor by the master, resigned his post of librarian of the Senate on the condition that Leconte de Lisle be appointed his successor. The last years of his life were somewhat brightened by his election, in 1886, to the French Academy, which had twice exposed him to the humiliation of rejection and had then, appositely enough, called him into its midst to fill the vacancy created by the death of Victor Hugo. He died in 1894, at the country-home of a friend at Louveciennes, not far from Paris, at the ripe old age of seventy-six.

It was by the publication, in 1852, of his first volume of verse, *les Poèmes antiques*, that Leconte de Lisle established his reputation at once as one of the foremost poets of the post-Romantic generation. He was not long in making the acquaintance of the principal writers of the day, and, towards 1860, after his marriage to a charming young Versailles, his home became the rendezvous of ambitious neophytes who aspired to a place in the poetic sun. In his fifth-floor apartment in the boulevard des Invalides, he

set up a *salon*, modestly yet graciously presided over by his wife, and here on Saturdays there gathered together the adoring group which was soon to collaborate in the production of the first *Parnasse contemporain*. The importance of Leconte de Lisle in the Parnassian movement can scarcely be overestimated; he was the unquestioned guide and literary father of the new generation.³ There has been, nevertheless, a faulty tendency among critics to make Parnassianism synonymous with Leconte de Lisle. The Parnassians paid the homage of imitation to at least two other masters, Théodore de Banville and Charles Baudelaire; it must be admitted, however, that Leconte de Lisle deserves priority, from the point of view of age as well as of weight of personal influence.

Leconte de Lisle was not a voluminous writer. In addition to his journalistic efforts, his translations, and several Voltairean brochures—including an *Histoire populaire du christianisme* and a *Catéchisme populaire républicain*—he published, during his lifetime, three volumes of verse: *Poèmes antiques* (1852), *Poèmes barbares* (1862), and *Poèmes tragiques* (1884). A year after his death, in 1895, there appeared a volume misnamed *Derniers poèmes*, which contained, besides verses written since the *Poèmes tragiques*, some composed much earlier but hitherto left unpublished. In the slughtness of his actual poetic output, as in so many other respects, Leconte de Lisle brings to mind Alfred de Vigny, to whom he shows a marked resemblance in both his attitude towards his art and his philosophy of life. In the address he delivered on the occasion of his reception into the French Academy,⁴ the poet told his audience that the first literary work to move him profoundly was Hugo's *les*

his
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no

³It is of interest to note that there was only one woman, besides Mme. Leconte de Lisle, in the original Parnassian group, Judith Gautier, the daughter of "le bon Théo," who seemed to be idolized by the members of the *salon* and was soon to become Mme. Catulle Mendès.

⁴March 31, 1887.

Orientales; and his reverence for the "Père" did not diminish throughout his life. Of the Romanticists, Hugo and Vigny alone earned Leconte de Lisle's admiration; for what he calls the "autolâtrie" of Lamartine and Musset he had no use whatsoever, and the poetic revolt which he instigated was largely a reaction against the sentimentality of these two Byronians, more especially, perhaps, of their emasculated imitators. Naturally enough, like Hugo and Vigny, Leconte de Lisle was early attached to André Chénier, with whose work he made himself thoroughly familiar and whose influence, it has been shown, is everywhere evident in his work,⁵ particularly in his Greco-Roman compositions. But however much he may have inherited from his three great predecessors, Leconte de Lisle was anything but a mere parrot; a cursory glance at his work will amply suffice to demonstrate the originality and profundity of his genius.]

In approaching our discussion of Leconte de Lisle's poetry, we must consider and come to some agreement upon a quality which, until recently, was almost without question automatically applied to the poet, that of "impassibility." Both Gautier and Albert Glatigny composed poems to which they gave the title of "l'Impassible," and one does not have to read far in the writings of the Parnassians to encounter this epithet repeatedly, especially in conjunction with "mother Nature"; so that the group was sometimes actually referred to as *les Impassibles*. As a matter of fact, the adjective was applied to Leconte de Lisle early in his career, clung to him throughout life, and was handed down to posterity as a simple label with which to distinguish him from the Romanticists. Alexandre Dumas fils, on receiving Leconte de Lisle into the French Academy, created something of a stir under the staid old cupola of the *Institut* by taking the poet to task for his "impassibility" and his pessimistic philosophy of life, and even went so far as to insinuate that it is a simple matter for those so weary of

⁵Vide C. Kramer: *op. cit.* It should be stated here that M. Kramer has allowed his thesis to run away with him to such an extent that he almost completely robs Leconte de Lisle of original genius.

the world to make their exit. The intimates of Leconte de Lisle, however, tell us that he was, by nature, deeply emotional and thoroughly susceptible to pain and suffering. In an interview with the poet, Huret reports him as having called "l'impassibilité" a "baliverne" and to have exclaimed: "Poète impassible! Alors quand on ne raconte pas de quelle façon on boutonne son pantalon et les péripéties de ses amourettes, on est un poète impassible? C'est stupide."⁶ As a matter of fact, Leconte de Lisle was capable of feeling profoundly, and his feelings burst their bonds occasionally and break into verse; as one writer puts it: "Ce soi-disant impassible fut, à ses heures, un douloureux sensitif."⁷ In general, however, he rigorously reined in his emotions or disguised them by clothing them in an impersonal garb through which they might only dimly be divined. The wisest course for us to follow will be to let his poetry speak for itself in this all-important matter.

Leconte de Lisle's first volume of verse, *les Poèmes antiques*, opens with a group of seven poems based upon Hindu mythology which are fundamental to our understanding of the poet.⁸ The first of these poems is a "Vedic Hymn," the second a "Vedic Prayer for the Dead"; the remaining include at least two of the finest compositions that were to spring from the pen of Leconte de Lisle, "Bhagavat" and "la Mort de Valmiki." In the former, three Brahmin priests, prevented by mental suffering—for one it is the memory of a youthful love, for the second the pain caused long since by the death of his mother, for the third the agony of philosophical doubt—from achieving the height of calm contemplation which is the ideal of their caste, are vouchsafed a glimpse of Bhagavat, "Essence des Essences, source de la beauté, fleuve des Renaissances," and, through

⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁷F. Calmettes, *Leconte de Lisle et ses amis* (Paris, Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, n.d., p. 87).

⁸It should be noted that, though these poems are inspired by the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata*, Leconte de Lisle did not read Sanskrit; he obtained his knowledge of the sacred literature of the Hindus from several works by Eugène Burnouf published about 1847.

the glorious vision, find their way into the bosom of
 "l'Essence première,"

"Le principe et la fin, erreur et vérité,
 Abîme de néant et de réalité
 Qu'enveloppe à jamais de sa flamme féconde
 L'invisible Mâyâ, créatrice du monde,
 Espoir et souvenir, le rêve et la raison,
 L'unique, l'éternelle et sainte Illusion."⁹

This note—that life and the phenomenal world are but the reflection of the Divine Illusion and are, *per se*, non-existent,—struck thus early in Leconte de Lisle's poetic career, is echoed and re-echoed throughout his work, now in the major key as affording the only reason for enduring an intolerable existence, but more often in the minor, with the afterthought that illusions are but sorry substitutes for realities and that the sole escape from Illusion is to be found in death. Thus, in "la Vision de Brahma," we are told:

"Mais rien n'a de substance et de réalité,
 Rien n'est vrai que l'unique et morne Eternité:
 O Brahma! toute chose est le rêve d'un rêve."¹⁰

The most concrete incarnation of this Hindu philosophy of life is to be found in "la Mort de Valmiki." Valmiki, "le poète immortel"—and Leconte de Lisle was undoubtedly thinking of himself in composing this poem—having lived a hundred years and wearied of existence, longed for that complete absorption into the soul of the universe, the Nirvana which is the goal of the Hindu philosopher. Having scaled the "sombre Himavat" to its summit, he contemplated the busy world at his feet:

"L'homme impassible voit cela, silencieux."¹¹

And as he is rapt in his meditation to the extent of being totally insensible to pain, he is attacked by a swarm of

⁹*Poèmes antiques*, Paris, Lemerre, n.d., p. 25.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 27.

white ants, which cover every inch of his body and end by penetrating, through the sockets of his eyes, into the cavity of his skull, "Et de ce corps vivant font un roide squelette."¹² In "Çunacépa"—a narrative poem relating the impending sacrifice of a young man and his rescue by divine intercession—there runs, almost as a refrain, the dictum: "Tout n'est qu'un songe vain," and the phenomenal world is styled "le Monde illusoire aux innombrables formes."¹³ The concluding poem of Leconte de Lisle's first volume, "Dies irae," is a summation of the illusions of history as exemplified by the powerlessness of the world's great religions to solve the fathomless problems of existence; the lips of doubt can be sealed only by death.

"Et toi, divine Mort, où tout rentre et s'efface,
Accueille tes enfants dans ton sein étoilé;
Affranchis-nous du temps, du nombre, et de l'espace,
Et rends-nous le repos que la vie a troublé."¹⁴

Small wonder, indeed, that Leconte de Lisle, aspiring to the Nirvana of the Brahmins, was accused of being "impassible."

Perhaps we may most effectively bring to a close our consideration of the Hindu side of Leconte de Lisle's nature and of his creative efforts by citing one of his shorter poems, "la Maya,"¹⁵ which may be said to sum up his entire philosophy of life:

"Maya! Maya! torrent des mobiles chimères,
Tu fais jaillir du cœur de l'homme universel
Les brèves voluptés, et les haines amères,
Le monde obscur des sens et la splendeur du ciel;
Mais qu'est-ce le cœur des hommes éphémères,
O Maya, sinon toi, le mirage immortel?
Les siècles écoulés, les minutes prochaines,
S'abîment dans ton ombre, en un même moment,
Avec nos cris, nos pleurs, et le sang de nos veines:
Eclair, rêve sinistre, éternité qui ment,
La Vie antique est faite inépuisablement
Du tourbillon sans fin des apparences vaines."

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹⁵*Poèmes tragiques*, p. 169.

But Leconte de Lisle's interest was not confined to the hagiographa of the Hindus and their religion. In his quality of seeker after ultimate verities, he studied and steeped himself in the sacred lore of the great peoples of Oriental antiquity and in the origins of the European races. Thus, in *les Poèmes barbares*, the poet draws upon the Old and New Testaments and upon the mythologies of Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, Ireland, Wales, and even Polynesia. In the greatest of the Biblical poems, "Qaïn," the assassin of Abel is, like the hero of Byron's *Cain*, depicted as a magnificent rebel against God. One stanza will suffice to indicate the tenor of this poem:

"Dieu triste, Dieu jaloux qui dérobes ta face,
Dieu qui mentais, disant que ton œuvre était bon,
Mon souffle, o Pétrisseur de l'antique limon,
Un jour redressera ta victime vivace.
Tu lui diras: Adore! Elle répondra: Non!"¹⁶

The poet's conception of the reaction of Jesus to the task which he had shouldered is expressed in "le Nazaréen,"¹⁷ a poem strongly reminiscent of Vigny's "le Mont des Oliviers"; in both poems, the Christian saviour is pictured as burdened with doubts as to the efficacy of his mission. Coming closer to his own day, Leconte de Lisle drew upon the Spanish *Romancero*, following the example of Hugo and Heinrich Heine, for the themes of some of his poems; and still others go to mediæval France, to Persia, and to the court of the Moorish sultans for their subject-matter.

~~Leconte de Lisle's prime concern, thus, was the reconstruction of the civilization of primitive man, wherever he might happen to be.~~ This he accomplished with a vigor of imagination which was bounded only by infinity in space and eternity in time. Critics have emphasized the epic quality of Leconte de Lisle's poetry, a quality which is frequently manifest in poems of only fourteen or sixteen

¹⁶*Poèmes barbares*, p. 18.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 304.

verses, like "le Combat homérique,"¹⁸ which has been called a miniature epic. In keeping with the breadth and loftiness of theme, the treatment is almost invariably marked by the tremendous sweep and the dignified objectivity of the world's great epics. What, however, was the reason for the poet's predilection for bygone civilizations and his obstinate avoidance of the contemporary and the personal? The answer to this query is to be found in the very *raison-d'être* of the Parnassian poetry. To quote Fernand Calmettes, the reverent disciple and one of the biographers of the poet: "Le sentiment qui groupa sous la maîtrise de Leconte de Lisle les fidèles du Parnasse fut un sentiment de triple protestation contre l'art d'outrance pratiqué par les romantiques hugolâtres, contre l'art banal des chansonniers (Déaugières, Béranger), contre l'art pleurard et facile des Lamartiniens dégénérés."¹⁹ In the preface to his *Poèmes antiques*, which was tantamount to a manifesto of his poetic æsthetics, the poet declared: "Il y a dans l'aveu public des angoisses du cœur et de ses voluptés, non moins amères, une vanité et une profanation gratuites." What, perhaps, had most attracted Leconte de Lisle to the Hindu philosophers was his sympathy with their doctrine that the individual soul is the greatest of all illusions; and he applied himself steadfastly to the banishment of the merest reflection of the "moi haïssable."²⁰ In a word, Leconte de Lisle had been repelled by the egolatry of the Byronic school of poetry, as represented in France by Lamartine, Musset, and their lachrymose imitators, and had fathered the reaction against this stripe of Romanticism which was embodied in the activities of the Parnassian group. Leconte de Lisle's attitude towards subjective

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 163.

²⁰Jean Dornis, *Essai sur Leconte de Lisle* (Paris, Ollendorff, 1909, p. 72). Calmettes, *op. cit.*, p. 174 tells us that this book was the work of a "grande dame" whose friendship Leconte de Lisle prized during his last years and who cloaked her true identity under a masculine pseudonym. The lady is now known to have been Mme. Guillaume Beer.

poetry is succinctly expressed in a sonnet which, though frequently quoted, bears repeated citation. The poem is entitled, "les Montreurs," and runs:

"Tel qu'un morne animal, meurtri, plein de poussière,
La chaîne au cou, hurlant au chaud soleil d'été,
Promène qui voudra son cœur ensanglanté
Sur ton pavé cynique, o plèbe carnassière!
Pour mettre un feu stérile en ton œil hébété,
Pour mendier ton rire ou ta pitié grossière,
Déchire qui voudra la robe de lumière
De la pudeur divine et de la volupté.

Dans mon orgueil muet, dans ma tombe sans gloire,
Dussé-je m'engloutir pour l'éternité noire,
Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse ou mon mal,

Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées."²¹

As a thinker, thus, Leconte de Lisle aspired after the calm detachment, the insensible contemplation of the Hindu sages. But there was another side to the poet's nature. While engaged in thinking profoundly upon the meaning or meaninglessness of life, he was, at the same time, vitally concerned in clothing his reflections in the most perfect possible attire. And so it came about that he presented a rare combination of the civilizations of Orient and Occident, a marriage of East to West, an exceptional molding of matter to manner. For, as an artist, Leconte de Lisle was a thorough-going Hellene.²² Indeed, in the preface to *les Poèmes antiques* already mentioned, the poet expressly stated that he was ignoring his French predecessors and returning to classical antiquity for his inspiration. Nor was this a mere figure of speech; for not only is the subject-matter of all of his Greek and Roman poems (the overwhelming majority of which are to be found in *les Poèmes*

²¹*Poèmes barbares*, p. 222.

²²For a masterly discussion of Leconte de Lisle's Hellenism, vide F. Desonay: *Le Rêve hellénique chez les poètes parnassiens* (Paris, Champion, 1928, chap. IV).

antiques) borrowed directly from Pindar, Horace, and their confreres, but their very technique often preserves the characteristics of the ancient masters. In his dialogued poems, for instance, such as "Hélène"²³ or "les Erinnyes,"²⁴ he reintroduced the classical chorus, an element that had virtually been banished from French tragedy since the Biblical dramas of Racine; and in his ode, "Kybèle,"²⁵ we find the strophe, antistrophe, and epode of the classical model. These, however, are mere details of structure; it is in a much larger sense that the poetry of Leconte de Lisle is Hellenic. For in him we have an artist incessantly pre-occupied with the demands of form, one who was endowed with a feeling for flawless symmetry of contour that made of him a veritable sculptor in verse. In the hands of Leconte de Lisle, a poem was a lump of clay or a block of marble to be kneaded or hewn until its proportions were perfect and its ensemble without a blemish. As a master of the difficult exigencies of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, none was his superior; and his skill in the use of tropes, delicate or vigorous as the occasion demanded, lags nowhit behind his technical wizardry. Indeed, if any objection there be to the poetry of Leconte de Lisle, it is that its sonorous beauty is so overpowering that the reader, fascinated by the magic of the verse, is likely to lose all thought of its meaning. A single perusal of a poem by Leconte de Lisle may leave the impression of a mere succession of mellifluous sounds; and a second, even a third, is usually necessary before the full significance of the content strikes home. Here, of course, is the reason for the fact that Leconte de Lisle has never been a popular poet; the average reader is a lazy fellow, and the concentration required for the complete understanding of this poetry is too exhausting for mental sluggards.

It would be idle to attempt here any analysis of Leconte de Lisle's Greek and Roman poems. When one has suggested

²³*Poèmes antiques*, p. 80 et seq.

²⁴*Poèmes tragiques*, p. 171 et seq.

²⁵*Poèmes antiques*, p. 125 et seq.

the reading of such exemplars as the twin poems "Glaucé" and "Thyoné," the magistral "Khirôn" and "Niobé," and the delicate arabesques that are the "Médailles antiques" and the "Etudes latines,"²⁸ one's duty has been fulfilled. The only additional point worthy of note is the fact that, since the poet was here intoxicated by his love for and striving after pure beauty, the nihilistic pessimism of the Hindu poems is in the main absent, so that the atmosphere is less depressing. After the fashion of the Dionysiac, Leconte de Lisle is here far less concerned with thought than with line and color and sound, and the result is a symphony of dazzling beauty.

—A third facet of the jewel that was Leconte de Lisle's poetry remains to be considered—his exoticism. Here we are dealing with the native of a tropical island in the Indian Ocean, whose memory, during some fifteen years of tranquil sojourn at the home of his parents, accumulated a noteworthy store of reactions to the life of the jungle. In a group of poems descriptive of the beast of prey, Leconte de Lisle reveals a mastery of the pictorial style that has earned him the laurels of one of France's leading *animaliers*. The *Poèmes barbares* was published in 1862, only three years after the appearance of the first of Darwin's epoch-making contributions to the biological sciences; and Leconte de Lisle, already an avowed materialist, immediately appropriated the law of the struggle for existence, which he applied to his poems of jungle life. A notable example of this phenomenon is to be found in "le Jaguar," in which is described the attack of an ox by a jaguar. Variations upon the theme of the survival of the fittest are contained in "la Panthère noire," "les Jungles," "le Rêve du jaguar," and "la

²⁸All of these are contained in *les Poèmes antiques*. It is only fair to mention the fact that Leconte de Lisle's efforts at literal transcriptions of the nomenclature of antiquity—Çunacépa, Qaïn, Héraklès, Khirôn—are oftentimes baffling to the reader and brought down many ungentle criticisms upon the poet's head from his contemporaries. On this point, vide Desonay, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-77.

Forêt vierge," all of which are heightened by the poet's use of exotic names for the fauna and flora of the jungle. In "Sacra fames" we see the struggle for existence going on in the depths of the sea. Other poems from Leconte de Lisle's bestiary are "le Sommeil du condor," "les Taureaux," "la Mort d'un lion," and "le Corbeau," the last-named slightly reminiscent of Poe's "Raven." Perhaps the finest specimen of Leconte de Lisle's mastery of the pictorial technique is the poem called "les Eléphants," descriptive of the advance of a herd of mastodons across the desert.²⁷ This poem merits quotation in full, but as this is precluded by its length, a shorter one, "Fultus hyacintho," which might well serve as legend to Paul Potter's painting, "The Bull," is here given as testimony of Leconte de Lisle's skill as *animalier*:

"C'est le roi de la plaine et des gras pâturages.
Plein d'une force lente, à travers les herbages
Il guide en mugissant ses compagnons pourprés
Et s'enivre à loisir de la verdure des prés.
Tel que Zeus, sur les mers portant la vierge Europe,
Une blancheur sans tache en entier l'enveloppe.
Sa corne est fine, aux bouts recourbés et polis,
Ses fanons florissants abondent à grands plis,
Une écume d'argent tombe à flots de sa bouche,
Et de longs poils épars couvrent son œil farouche,
Il paît jusques à l'heure où, du Zénith brûlant,
Midi plane, immobile, et lui chauffe le flanc.
Alors des saules verts l'ombre discrète et douce
Lui fait un large lit d'hyacinthe et de mousse,
Et couché comme un Dieu près du fleuve endormi,
Pacifique, il rumine et clôt l'œil à demi."

The poems cited thus far would seem to offer irrefutable support to the claim of those who accused Leconte de Lisle of being "impassible." There were moments, however, when the poet forgot or wilfully abandoned the steely objectivity to which he had schooled himself. To be sure, in

²⁷All the poems mentioned in this paragraph are from *les Poèmes barbares*, with the exception of "Sacra fames," which is from *les Poèmes tragiques*, and "Fultus hyacintho," which is from *les Poèmes antiques*.

his personal relations, he would seem to have been a flesh-and-blood human being—so much so that one who knew him intimately could say of him: “Seuls les esprits légers ont pu l’accuser d’avoir abrité son calme égoïste derrière les immuables parois d’une tour d’ivoire; ceux-là n’ont pas connu son cœur qu’il leur dérobait sous les lames d’or d’une impénétrable cuirasse. Ils le déclaraient impassible parce qu’il était hautain, marmoréen parce qu’il n’a pas chanté la couleur satinée des seins de sa maîtresse et qu’il a préféré peindre l’éternelle harmonie de la beauté sereine; mais, comme a dit un de ses meilleurs élèves, le vicomte de Guerne, tout étonné d’en avoir fait la découverte: ‘Les femmes ont beaucoup compté dans sa vie.’”²⁸ A glimpse at a few of Leconte de Lisle’s compositions will suffice to convince us that the poet did not always succeed in keeping his heart locked as in a vault but now and then permitted his emotions to burst their bonds.

In the years of his adolescence, Leconte de Lisle had been smitten by the vivacious beauty of a cousin, whose father, a brother of the poet’s mother, had married a mulatto woman on the Ile de Bourbon. This youthful love had apparently remained unrequited, and could, in any event, not have been crowned by marriage, as Mme. Leconte de Lisle would not hear of a union of her son with a quadroon, despite the fact that the young girl was possessed of thoroughly Caucasian features and skin and was, to boot, her own niece. Long years afterward, on the occasion of the death of this Mlle. de Lanux, Leconte de Lisle composed one of the most delicate and touching of all his poems, “le Manchy,”²⁹ in which he celebrates the langorous beauty of the girl who was “le charme de mes premiers rêves.” Once he had settled in France, however, and determined to surmount the most arduous heights of art and of thought, the poet resolutely refused to permit himself to be carried away

²⁸Calmettes, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–87.

²⁹*Poèmes barbares*, p. 190. The “manchy” is a sort of wicker litter in which the wives and daughters of the Bourbon creoles were carried about by the negro slaves.

by physical love. Though he was always sensitive to feminine beauty, especially to that of young girls, he forced himself to think of love as something spiritual, intellectual. As a matter of fact, he was not without his passionate love-affairs, the majority of which were, it would seem, innocent; and some of them left searing wounds which sought healing in the music of verse. In one of the bitterest poems he was ever to pen, "la Vipère,"³⁰ the poet poured out the vials of the suffering consequent upon a disillusionment in love. We read:

"Si les chastes amours avec respect louées
Eblouissent encor ta pensée et tes yeux,
N'effleure point les plis de leurs robes nouées,
Garde la pureté de ton rêve pieux.
Ces blanches visions, ces vierges que tu crées
Sont ta jeunesse en fleur épanouie au ciel!
Verse à leurs pieds le flot de tes larmes sacrées,
Brûle tous les parfums sur leur mystique autel.
Mais si l'amer venin est entré dans tes veines,
Pâle de volupté pleurée et de langueur,
Tu chercheras en vain un remède à tes peines;
L'angoisse du néant te remplira le cœur.
Ployé sous ton fardeau de honte et de misère,
D'un exécration mal ne vis pas consumé.
Arrache de ton sein la mortelle vipère,
Ou tais-toi, lâche, et meurs, meurs d'avoir trop aimé!"

Rarely again did Leconte de Lisle permit his rage at a personal disappointment to dominate so completely his feelings. There are other poems in which he laments the shattering of the ideals of his youth, the failure of life to live up to its promises. In "l'Aurore,"³¹ he mourns for his

"Jeunesse sacrée, irréparable joie,
Félicité perdue, où l'âme en pleurs se noie!

Formes de l'idéal, magnifiques aux yeux,
Vous avez disparu de mon cœur oublieux."

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 252.

³¹*Poèmes barbares*, p. 202.

Even Nature proves to be but another illusion, and when the poet seeks refuge in her bosom, he discovers, as had Vigny before him, that she is totally insensible to the sufferings of man. This idea is vigorously voiced in the concluding stanza of "la Fontaine aux lianes":³²

"La nature se rit des souffrances humaines;
Ne contemplant jamais que sa propre grandeur,
Elle dispense à tout ses forces souveraines
Et garde pour sa part le calme et la splendeur."

The only reality, then, is the oblivion, the nothingness that come with death, and, in a group of highly characteristic poems, Leconte de Lisle lauds death as the blessed end of the martyring illusion that is life and invokes its aid in rescuing him from the ennui of living. In "le Vœu suprême,"³³ he declares: "Le mal est de trop vivre, et la mort est meilleure"; in "Aux morts," he envies the dead the "irrévocable paix" which they enjoy; in "Fiat nox," he looks forward to "l'universelle mort," for "l'angoisse et le bonheur sont le rêve d'un rêve"; and in "Requies," he faces calmly the prospect of death. The last stanza of this poem reads:

"La vie ainsi faite, il nous faut la subir.
Le faible souffre et pleure, l'insensé s'en irrite;
Mais le plus sage en rit, sachant qu'il doit mourir.
Rentre au tombeau muet où l'homme enfin s'abrite,
Et là, sans nul souci de la terre et du ciel,
Repose, ô malheureux, pour le temps éternel."³⁴

In "l'illusion suprême,"³⁵ the poet asks himself the meaning and the value of human loves, joys, and reflections, and his reply is that "la poussière humaine, . . . Les Dieux qu'elle a conçus et l'univers stupide, Ne valent pas la paix impassible des morts." Life and nature and love, all are but

³²*Ibid.*, p. 171.

³³This and the remaining poems quoted in this connection are all from *les Poèmes barbares*.

³⁴*Poèmes barbares*, p. 260.

³⁵*Poèmes tragiques*, p. 37.

"vanity of vanities"; however, one must either live or transfer oneself by violence to the shades of Pluto. And who knows whether even death is not the greatest of all illusions? Why hasten the discovery of the answer of this most insoluble of all enigmas? Let us, then, says the poet, in "Ultra coelos,"³⁶ repelled by the "impassible beauté" of Nature and the meaningless suffering of existence, hurl a challenge at life:

"A de lointains soleils allons montrer nos chaînes,
Allons combattre encor, penser, aimer, souffrir;
Et, savourant l'horreur des tortures humaines,
Vivons, puisqu'on ne peut oublier ni mourir."

Manifestly, then, Leconte de Lisle did not always succeed in his ambition to achieve the impassible detachment of the Hindu sage; his poetry seethes and surges with the "tortures humaines" which he feels in his own heart and sees about him everywhere. True enough, his own wretchedness is usually merged in that of mankind, so that, even in his bitterest moods, his poetry rarely assumes the individualistic coloring of that of Musset or of Lamartine; none the less, the microcosmic agony is there, brooding like a volcano upon the ills of humanity. And not only on the subject of life and death are there eruptions of the nature just described; on at least one other phase of the history of man did the poet's indignation wax hot and overflow, namely, on the cruelty and superstitiousness of mediæval Catholicism. The son of an exceedingly devout mother, and himself by nature deeply mystical, Leconte de Lisle began life as a practicing Catholic. All his life "féru d'idéal," he early became convinced, because of the misery of the laboring classes, that Mother Church did not offer the key to human happiness; and, before long, he had come to the belief that religions are the cause of most of the unhappiness of men. Though he always professed the greatest reverence for Jesus of Nazareth, he doubted his divinity,

³⁶*Poèmes barbares*, p. 220.

and denied Providence and the God of the dogmatic creeds. Especially did he despise the fanaticism and the obscurantism of the Christianity of the Dark Ages, the "siècles maudits," as he himself terms them, the "hideux siècles de foi, de lèpre et de famine Que le reflet sanglant des bûchers illumine";³⁷ the age of despair, of atrocious hatred, of the plundering noble and the enslaved vassal, the age of ceremonies and superstitions. The concluding lines of "les Siècles maudits" would alone suffice to give the lie to the charge that Leconte de Lisle was incapable of deep feeling.

"O siècles d'égorgeurs, de lâches et de brutes,
Honte de ce vieux globe et de l'humanité,
Maudits, soyez maudits, et pour l'éternité!"

In "l'Holocauste,"³⁸ the poet describes in fiery words of scorn the *auto-da-fé*, in the year of grace 1609, of a man who had denied the existence of God. In "l'Agonie d'un saint,"³⁹ the poet shows us on his death-bed a bishop who had devoted his life to the slaughtering of heretics and is now refused admission into Heaven, which is full of his victims. He had been a ferocious wolf, an assassin who had been prompted in his numerous executions by his pride and the certainty that he was thereby assuring his eternal bliss; but he is rejected as the vilest of creatures.

"Va! car tu souillerais l'innocence du ciel,
Et mes anges mourraient d'horreur devant ta face!"

As a philosopher, then, Leconte de Lisle passed through various metamorphoses. Beginning as an orthodox Catholic, he soon substituted the social for the religious ideal, and became an active member of the communistic society which had been founded by Fourier. When the humanitarian aims of the Fourierist *phalanstère* failed to move further along the road to materialization after the revolution of 1848, Leconte de Lisle returned to "vivre, sur les

³⁷*Poèmes tragiques*, p. 59.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁹*Poèmes barbares*, p. 318.

hauteurs intellectuelles, dans une sereine contemplation des formes divines.”⁴⁰ Withdrawing into the study of the history and mythology of the peoples of the East, he espoused the stoical, pantheistic philosophy of the Buddhists; thence, through the materialistic positivism of Auguste Comte to a pessimism that amounted virtually to an intellectual nihilism, was but a step, almost, one might add, in the case of Leconte de Lisle, the inevitable step. In one of the last of the poems published during his lifetime, “le Secret de la vie,”⁴¹ he sums up in a few stanzas the metaphysical conclusion at which he has arrived—a Mephistophelian negation of life.

Le secret de la vie est dans les tombes closes;
Ce qui n'est plus n'est tel que pour avoir été;
Et le néant final des êtres et des choses
Est l'unique raison de leur réalité.

O vieille Illusion, la première des causes!
Pourquoi nous éveiller de notre éternité,
Si, toi-même n'étant que leurre et vanité,
Le secret de la vie est dans les tombes closes?

Hommes, bêtes et Dieux et monde illimité,
Tout cela jaillit, meurt de tes métamorphoses.
Dans les siècles, que tu fais naître et décomposes,
Ce qui n'est plus n'est tel que pour avoir été.

A travers tous les temps, splendides ou moroses,
L'esprit, rapide éclair, en leur vol emporté,
Conçoit fatalement sa propre inanité
Et le néant final des êtres et des choses.

Oui! sans toi, qui n'es rien, rien n'aurait existé:
Amour, crimes, vertu, les poisons, ni les roses.
Le rêve évanoui de tes œuvres écloses
Est l'unique raison de leur réalité.

Ne reste pas inerte au seuil des portes closes,
Homme! sache mourir afin d'avoir été;
Et, hors du tourbillon mystérieux des choses,
Cherche au fond de la tombe, en sa réalité,
Le secret de la vie.”

⁴⁰Dornis, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴¹*Poèmes tragiques*, p. 252.

If Leconte de Lisle may be said to have had any positive religion at all, it was a sort of "æsthetic mysticism" the deity of which was the art of poetry. As one critic has it: "C'est pour la religion poétique et lyrique de la Sainte Beauté et de l'Art parfait que Leconte de Lisle a vécu. Il a passé sur la terre, dans un temps de critique, de machinisme, d'industrie, comme un Olympien en exil. Il a été vraiment le prêtre de ce Temple éblouissant que la magie de ses vers a évoqué pour toujours et précisé dans une apparence incorruptible entre la terre et le ciel."⁴² Naturally, therefore, Leconte de Lisle was an ardent advocate of the theory of "l'art pour l'art" as opposed to a "moral" or "national" art. To be sure, he believed firmly in the educative value of great art, especially of poetry, and we have seen the rôle played in his work by metaphysical inquiry. Like Hugo, he conceived of the function of the poet in society as that of a "voyant," a "seer," and his collected poems have been frequently compared with Hugo's *la Légende des siècles*. But, in whatever he wrote, he aimed, on the one hand, at the complete submergence of his personality in his art, and, on the other, at absolute artistic perfection. Although he insisted that content must not be sacrificed to form, he was equally convinced that slovenliness of form makes for mud-diness of thought. Consequently, he was a severe critic of the Romantic poets and a merciless judge of the work of those who placed themselves under his tutelage. He believed in the *rapprochement* of art and science by the application to the former of the exactness of the latter. Poetry, therefore, is a matter of patient labor and erudition; it can be learned, for it has its rules of harmony, color, counterpoint. Hence his scorn for the work of Lamartine and Musset, his admiration for that of Vigny and Gautier. He was richly endowed with all the qualities that combine to form the great poet—sensitiveness to the beauties in Nature, a delicate feeling for shades of meaning, a vigorous imagination, the ability to fix his thought by the choice of apt figures of speech, an ear attuned to all the variegated

⁴²Dornis, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

music of verse, a strong sense of the pictorial and the epic, and even, despite his efforts to keep it subdued, a now tremulous, now wrathful lyricism. The intellectual objectivity of Leconte de Lisle, however, is his most distinguishing characteristic; and we may well close our discussion of the poet with a sentence by the critic Brunetière, which Leconte de Lisle himself would probably have deemed the highest possible meed of praise. "Nul," says this student of the various manifestations of French literary genius, "pas même Flaubert, n'a mieux compris ni plus fidèlement observé que Leconte de Lisle la doctrine de l'impersonnalité de l'art."⁴³

JOSE-MARIA DE HEREDIA

If we have dwelt in such detail upon the life, thought, and work of Leconte de Lisle, it is because, though recognized by his fellow-countrymen as one of the outstanding figures in the poetry of the latter half of the past century, he has not received among English-speaking peoples the attention he merits. In the remainder of this chapter, we shall pass somewhat summarily in review the principal comrades and disciples of Leconte de Lisle. Of these, the first place must be assigned to the poet who was unashamed to confess to his master that "mon titre le plus sûr à quelque gloire sera d'avoir été votre élève bien-aimé"¹—José-Maria de Heredia.

Heredia is one of the strangest phenomena in the history of French lyric poetry. Like Leconte de Lisle of Creole origin, the scion of an illustrious family of Spanish nobility, he was to write in what was necessarily an adoptive language and to take his place among the master wielders of what Anatole France loved to call "le beau français." Moreover, his reputation, scarcely questioned in his own day and solidified since his death, rests solely and alone

⁴³*La Poésie lyrique en France* (quoted by Dornis, *op. cit.*, p. 149).

¹*Les Trophées* (Paris, Lemerre, 1893—dedicatory epistle to Leconte de Lisle, p. III).

upon a single published volume of verse: *les Trophées*, composed of a hundred and a score sonnets, three poems based on the Spanish *Romancero*, and an epic fragment.² A slim pedestal, one might suppose, for the immortality of a poet; and yet Heredia seems destined to survive.

José-Maria de Heredia was born on the island of Cuba on November 22, 1842. His father, Don Domingo de Heredia, was the descendant of a family of Spanish grandees which had settled in Santo Domingo as early as the sixteenth century and one of whose ancestors, Don Pedro de Heredia, had participated in an expedition of Bartholomew Columbus, brother of the more renowned Christopher, and had founded a city on the coast of Colombia in the year 1532. The mother of the future poet was a French Creole, one of whose ancestors, Girard d'Ouville, had been "président à mortier" of the Parliament of Normandy under Louis XV. José-Maria, the youngest of eight children, was thus "le descendant des Vikings et des Conquistadors."³ A cousin-german of the author of *les Trophées*, whose given name, interestingly enough, was José-María, born in Santiago in 1803, was likewise a poet; he, however, wrote in Spanish and is counted among the foremost Spanish-American lyricists. Despite the splendor of his Hispanic heritage, the mother of our José-Maria set her heart upon having her son educated in France, a project which the death of his father in 1849 postponed but did not thwart. At the age of nine, the boy was entrusted to a friend of the family and placed at the Collège Saint-Vincent in the Norman town of Senlis. The six years he spent at this institution were marked by assiduous study, joyous comradeship with schoolmates, and pleasant vacations with relatives in various parts of France. But there was nothing, as yet,

²To be sure, he signed his name to numerous prose writings—translations from the Spanish, critical essays, necrologies, and so on—but, without *les Trophées*, Heredia's name would have been totally unknown.

³M. Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, p. 11. For an amusing reference to José-María Heredia, the Cuban poet, vide Calmettes, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

to foreshadow the future expatriation of the poet. Returning to Cuba in 1859, he continued his studies in Havana, displaying a fluency in Spanish remarkable in one who had for so long abandoned the familial tongue. At this time, his intention was to study law in Spain and perhaps practice either in that country or in his native island. The desire of his mother to spend her last years in the land of her ancestors, however, brought Heredia back to France in 1861, and he was soon in Paris, enrolled as a student both at the Faculté de Droit and the Ecole des Chartes. But though he distinguished himself at the latter institution and obtained from the former the "licence en droit" in 1864, he abandoned any notion he may have had of entering the legal profession, his personal fortune dispensing him of the necessity of earning a livelihood.

There was, however, a more fundamental reason for Heredia's abandonment of the law. While yet a student at Saint-Vincent, the young Cuban had begun to "frequent the Muse," and the purchase, in 1858, of the Poulet-Malassis edition of Leconte de Lisle's *Poésies complètes* had oriented his thoughts in this new direction. Captivated by the verses of the Bourbon creole and by the reading of Ronsard and of *la Légende des siècles*, the young Heredia, a "Parnassien avant la lettre,"⁴ began to entertain serious notions of devoting himself to a career of letters, and a growing repugnance for the law and its chicaneries as well as his financial independence encouraged him, upon the completion of his studies, to essay the arduous climb up the steeps of Parnassus.

The real reason, perhaps, for Heredia's meteoric rise in the realm of letters was his realization of his abilities and his limitations. As early as 1860, during his sojourn in Cuba, the poet had written his first sonnet, "A la fontaine de la India,"⁵ and for the next three decades, he set himself the task of achieving the distinction of being France's most

⁴Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁵Unpublished—printed by Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

finished sonneteer. With the publication of his first important sonnets, in such periodicals as *la Revue française* and *la Revue de Paris* in the years 1863 and 1864, and with his entrance into the *salon* of Leconte de Lisle and thence into the "entresol des Parnassiens" at the shop of Alphonse Lemerre, Heredia, though a mere youth, was eagerly welcomed into the ranks of the poets who looked upon themselves as the legitimate successors of the Romanticists and were preparing to set the literary world aflame with a regenerated and revived poetry. Endowed with a flamboyant personality and a whole-souled love of pure art, the Cuban could scarcely avoid attracting attention, and it was not long before he had attained the position of "élève bien-aimé" of the master-Parnassian, Leconte de Lisle.

In one of his illuminating *Promenades littéraires*,⁶ Remy de Gourmont finds three stages of poetic art and three generations of poets represented by Gautier, Banville, and Heredia; perhaps it was because the editors of the first *Parnasse contemporain* instinctively felt this that they printed representative verses of these three poets in the above-named order and placed Heredia, a lad of twenty-four in 1866, even before Leconte de Lisle. It is interesting to note that, of the six sonnets of Heredia included in the first *Parnasse contemporain*, four found place in *les Trophées*, one practically in its original form, the others slightly altered. The second *Parnasse* contained the fragmentary "la Détresse d'Atahualpa" also reprinted in the *Trophées*, while the third *Recueil* gave room to no less than twenty-five sonnets of Heredia's composition, all of them now to be found in the poet's one published volume. Thus, the three *Recueils* actually served as preliminary mould for the *Trophées*, although sonnets contained in it were originally contributed by Heredia, in varying though never large numbers yearly, also to such literary periodicals as *la République des lettres*, *l'Artiste*, *la Renaissance littéraire et artistique*, and *la Revue des deux mondes*. When finally, in

⁶Vol. II (eleventh edition, Paris, Mercure de France, 1913—essay on "M. de Heredia et les poètes parnassiens").

1893, he carried out the project he had so long been cogitating and collected all but fourteen sonnets which had already appeared into the volume upon which his fame now rests,⁷ he achieved what many critics have agreed in regarding the crowning monument of Parnassianism. *Les Trophées* was accorded an exceedingly enthusiastic reception, the first edition was rapidly exhausted, and, in the very next year, Heredia was elected into the French Academy to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Charles de Mazade. This election proved highly popular and Heredia's "discours de réception" "fit courir dans Paris une rumeur d'admiration."⁸ Thus was climaxed the thirty-year activity of Heredia as chiseler of sonnets.

Heredia's election to the Academy served to consolidate what had for a quarter of a century been a visibly growing reputation. As a prominent member of the Leconte de Lisle *salon*, he had become known to the whole of literary Paris, and with his rise to the dignity of Academician, he inaugurated a *salon* of his own which, upon the death of his master, became the last stronghold of the remaining Parnassians. His personal fortune having been considerably diminished by financial reverses, the poet was offered, and accepted, the literary editorship of the Paris daily, *le Journal*. This added prestige made of Heredia's apartment the rendezvous of men of letters, not alone of the Parnassian group, but also of the new generation, towards whose work he displayed a sympathy in marked contrast with the harshness of Leconte de Lisle. Numerous are the printed reminiscences of the "samedis littéraires" of the

⁷According to L. -X. de Ricard (in "Petits mémoires d'un Parnassien," *le Petit temps*, July 2, 1899, p. 4), Heredia had conceived the idea of publishing a volume of sonnets as early as 1866, and had intended calling the book *Fleurs de feu* after the sonnet of that name printed in the first *Parnasse contemporain*. The first mention of Heredia's plan to call his volume *les Trophées* is to be found in the "réminiscences" of Catulle Mendès in *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, July-December, 1879, p. 501).

⁸Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

rue de Balzac, the continuation of Leconte de Lisle's Saturdays, and the testimony is virtually unanimous as to the charm of the host and the verve of the discussions engaged in by the guests.⁹ When, in 1901, the poet was appointed administrator of the library of the Arsenal and took up his quarters in the historic edifice that had seen the beginnings of the French Romantic movement under the ægis of Charles Nodier, the *salon* was continued on Sundays, and Heredia, who had practically ceased writing, lent a willing ear to the compositions of Parnassians, Symbolists, and *prosateurs*, encouraging and advising in the spirit of attachment to art which had marked his entire career. His death in 1905 was mourned as a national loss.

We have already seen that Heredia was allotted considerable space in each of the three volumes of the *Parnasse contemporain*. The editors of the *Recueils* realized that they had in him a true embodiment of the Parnassian ideal of art—complete self-detachment in a thorough-going surrender to the demands of poetic æsthetics. Leconte de Lisle was branded as "impassible," and yet he could write "le Manchy," "la Vipère," "les Montreurs," and the poems dealing with the "siècles maudits." Heredia, on the other hand, attained to the very apex of pictorial poetry, into which the personality of the poet was very rarely injected, and then only in a distant manner from which all superficial emotion was excluded. As a reaction from the sentimentality of the more maudlin members of the Romantic school, some of the Parnassians, following in the wake of Chénier, Hugo and Vigny, loosed their emotions in a warm, colorful recreation of antiquity. Thus Hugo in *la Légende des siècles*, and thus Leconte de Lisle in *les Poèmes antiques*. Without these two works, Heredia might never have written a line; with them as guide and incentive, he achieved a work which may justly be called a *Légende des siècles*. A mere glance at the table of contents of *les Trophées* will suffice to demonstrate this fact. The sonnets are grouped

⁹For an excellent account of the Heredia *salon*, vide Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-91.

into five rubrics: "La Grèce et la Sicile," "Rome et les barbares," "le Moyen âge et la Renaissance," "l'Orient et les tropiques," and "la Nature et le rêve," and these are followed by the three poems from the *Romancero* cycle and the epic fragment on the conquest of Peru. There is, of course, no attempt to give a consecutive narration of the history of mankind, as Molière's *Mascarille* was preparing to write a history of Rome in madrigals; but each of the main epochs of the story of civilization is deftly suggested by a series of highly graphic pictures. In the "Nature et rêve" category, the poet deviates from this method to voice his reactions to the Brittany coast and so far forgets himself as to give vent to such emotions as nostalgia, as in "Brise marine," and even love, as in "la Conque," in which latter poem occur these lines, rather unexpected in Heredia:

"Mon âme est devenue une prison sonore:

Ainsi du plus profond de ce coeur trop plein d'Elle,
Sourde, lente, insensible et pourtant éternelle,
Gronde en moi l'orageuse et lointaine rumeur."¹⁰

In the main, however, it is only through his reflection of vanished or moribund civilizations that we can form any real conception of Heredia's feelings and prejudices, in a word, of his personality.

Like Leconte de Lisle and most of his Parnassian confreres, Heredia was criticized as insensible, emotionless, a mere verbal mountebank lacking in metaphysical profundity. We have seen in how far these cavilings, as applied to Leconte de Lisle, were justified and in what respects they were baseless. Heredia's biographer, Ibrovac, is at great pains to dispel the legends of insensibility and superficiality that have always hovered over the master-sonneteer. The truth, as usual, may be said to lie somewhere between the extremes of censure and encomium. In any case, however, even the most violent strictures would still leave room for an acknowledgment of qualities in

¹⁰*Les Trophées*, p. 149.

which Heredia has scarcely been surpassed. For sonority of rhythm, for flamboyance and opulence of vocabulary, for a deep-rooted sense of the melodic and harmonic splendor of words, Heredia has not many peers in French lyric poetry. A striking resemblance exists between the poet of *les Trophées* and the author of *Salammbô*. Both were minutely painstaking and, as a consequence, the opposite of prolific; both were animated by a love of art which amounted to a religion; both had a flair for the exact, and at the same time picturesque, word which was little short of the miraculous. The sonnets of Heredia fairly reel in a bacchanalia of tympanic, purpureal words, many of them drawn from the related arts of painting, enameling, carving in gold, ivory, or bronze. And as an architect in the difficult sonnet-form (so generally essayed and with such comparatively infrequent success), as a master-builder in verse, Heredia will probably long withstand the test of time.

It would be unfair to terminate this consideration of Heredia without including illustrative specimens of the art in which he so excelled. Though any choice is difficult, if not even unjust, as implying a superiority which may not be possessed, we shall limit ourselves to the reproduction of two of the sonnets, "Fleurs de feu," one of the earliest examples of Heredia's proficiency in the art, and "A un fondateur de ville," in which the poet celebrates his distinguished ancestor, Don Pedro de Heredia.

FLEURS DE FEU

"Bien des siècles depuis les siècles du Chaos,
La flamme par torrents jaillit de ce cratère,
Et le panache igné du volcan solitaire
Flamba plus haut encor que les Chimborazos.

Nul bruit n'éveille plus la cime sans échos.
Où la cendre pleuvait l'oiseau se désaltère;
Le sol est immobile et le sang de la Terre,
La lave, en se figeant, lui laissa le repos.

Pourtant, suprême effort de l'antique incendie,
A l'orle de la gueule à jamais refroidie,
Eclatant à travers les rocs pulvérisés,

Comme un coup de tonnerre au milieu du silence,
Dans le poudroiment d'or du pollen qu'elle lance,
S'épanouit la fleur des cactus embrasés."¹⁰

A UN FONDATEUR DE VILLE

"Las de poursuivre en vain l'Ophir insaisissable,
Tu fondas, en un pli de ce golfe enchanté
Où l'étendard royal par tes mains fut planté,
Une Carthage neuve au pays de la Fable.

Tu voulais que ton nom ne fût point périssable,
Et tu crus l'avoir bien pour toujours cimenté
A ce mortier sanglant dont tu fis ta cité,
Mais ton espoir, soldat, fut bâti sur le sable.

Carthagine étouffant sous le torride azur,
Avec ses noirs palais voit s'écrouler ton mur
Dans l'Océan fiévreux qui dévore sa grève;

Et seule, à ton cimier brille, ô Conquistador,
Héraldique témoin des splendeurs de ton rêve,
Une ville d'argent qu'ombrage un palmier d'or."¹¹

LOUIS MENARD

It would be a serious error of omission to enumerate the principal confreres and disciples of Leconte de Lisle without devoting at least a few scant pages to the consideration of one whose life was for thirty years so closely bound up with that of the master that he was at once his teacher and

¹⁰*Les Trophées*, p. 128.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 116. For a consideration of the Hellenism of Heredia, vide Desonay. *op. cit.*, chap. VI. Desonay finds the Hellenism of both Leconte de Lisle and Heredia purely superficial and their supposed erudition a sham. He considers both of them inferior to Louis Ménard and Anatole France as genuine Hellenists, but grants them all honor as master word-painters and unexcelled practitioners of the alexandrine.

his student, his friend, guide, and follower—Louis Ménard. This man, whose name has virtually sunk into oblivion, played a preponderant rôle in the life of Leconte de Lisle. Born in Paris in 1822, he made the acquaintance of the son of the tropics shortly after the latter had definitely established himself in the capital in 1846. The men were attracted to one another by their humanitarian interests and worked side by side throughout the troublous days of 1848. But it was not their utopianism alone that they shared; for Ménard, too, was a poet, and, what is more significant, he was fired by an intense love for classical antiquity which he voiced on every possible occasion. If he did not actually awaken Leconte de Lisle's interest in pagan Greece and Rome, he undoubtedly assisted and encouraged his friend in his studies in primitive civilizations.¹ As early as 1843, he had written a "Prométhée délivré" inspired by the drama of Aeschylus, which was followed by a succession of poems on classical themes finally assembled, in 1855, into a volume of *Poèmes* which, it has been pointed out, might well have assumed the epithet of "antiques" had not Leconte de Lisle's volume appeared three years earlier. If Ménard's verses fall short of those of Leconte de Lisle in inspiration, his volume was lent real significance by an introductory essay in which he bewailed the materialism and the positivism of the age which, he declared, had already murdered architecture and was exposing poetry to the same fate. Just as the octogenarian has little but his memories for which to live, so poetry, in its senescence, must look for rejuvenation to its youth. And so Ménard, addressing Poesy, essays to "évoquer les ombres; je te parlerai de ta jeunesse. . . . Je relèverai, dans les vieux temples, les images vénérées de nos dieux d'autrefois."² Leconte de Lisle's effort to evoke the departed shade of primeval man has been recounted; it is not to be wondered, thus, that the two men should have

¹On this point, as on the whole matter of the Hellenism of Ménard, vide Desonay, *op. cit.*, chap. III.

²*Poèmes et rêveries d'un païen mystique*—"Vox in deserto" (Paris, Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1895, p. 3).

formed so close a friendship. We have already noted the importance attached by the Parnassians to the revivification of antiquity; and if Leconte de Lisle was, in goodly measure, responsible for this interest, he was without question largely indebted himself to the poet who had so completely identified himself with the spirit of the Greeks that he was affectionately styled by his friends "Ménardos." One critic calls Ménard "le premier et le plus fervent des Hellènes de son temps" and goes so far as to declare that "c'est lui qui a véritablement initié à l'atticisme son ami Leconte de Lisle"; furthermore, he goes to some trouble to demonstrate that it was from Ménard rather than from Leconte de Lisle that Heredia obtained his general conception of Greek antiquity.³

In a practical way, Ménard was highly instrumental in the formation of the Parnassian group. It was he who introduced into the Leconte de Lisle *cénacle* the band of poets who had gathered about Catulle Mendès, and his unquenchable poetic ardor served as an ever-present stimulus to the newer generation. The first *Parnasse contemporain* contains a group of "Sonnets mystiques" by Ménard, the first of which, "Nirvana," we have earlier cited in full; the second *Recueil* included no less than seven sonnets published under the same general title. This title is significant; for, in 1876, there appeared the volume upon which Ménard's slender fame may be said to rest, the *Rêveries d'un païen mystique*, a collection of poems, sketches, and tales shot through with the pagan philosophy of life. In his devotion to "pure art" at a time when the world was so generally becoming industrialized and despite the fact that he himself, as we shall see, was no mean scientist, Ménard was a typical Parnassian and deserves well of all lovers of the lyric Muse.

Though he readily acknowledged the superiority of Leconte de Lisle as a poet, Ménard was, of the two men, far and away the profounder mind and possessed a much wider

³Ibrovac, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

range of interests. There were numerous facets to the genius of this unusual individual. His first inclinations lay in the field of science and, as a chemist, he was responsible for several discoveries of importance. But the isolation of the chemical laboratory was irksome to his active mind; and, penetrated with a burning desire to ameliorate the sufferings of mankind, he became an active member of the radical Republican group which was largely responsible for the revolution of 1848. Dissatisfied with the results of this uprising, he published in a proletarian journal, *le Peuple*, a series of *feuilletons* which were then assembled and issued in the form of a volume to which he gave the name of *Prologue d'une révolution*. This work earned its author an attack by the government resulting in a sentence to fifteen months' imprisonment and a fine of ten thousand francs. Ménard escaped this penalty by fleeing to London and later to Brussels, where he eked out a wretched existence as a journalist until the amnesty of 1852 permitted him to return to Paris. He now devoted his attention to literature, and earned the friendship of Baudelaire and of Banville, in addition to that of Leconte de Lisle. Making the acquaintance of Renan, he was encouraged to pursue a regular course of study in the civilization of antiquity, and he obtained his doctorate at the Sorbonne with two theses on classical literature and philosophy. But his restless mind was still unsatisfied. Having previously manifested talent as a painter, he attached himself to the Barbizon school during the ten years from 1860 to 1870, and exhibited paintings of no inconsiderable merit. Abandoning the brush and the easel after the stirring days of the Paris Commune in 1871, with which he was in heartiest sympathy though his absence on a visit in London prevented his active participation in the struggle, he resumed his classical studies, and published several works in this field, notably an *Histoire des Grecs* (1884-1886). In 1887, he was appointed professor at the Ecole des arts décoratifs, and he later lectured on general history at the Paris Hôtel de Ville. This active and many-sided career came to an end in 1901, long

after the Parnassian group had ceased to function. As a peculiar combination of pagan mysticism and modern science, Ménard was one of the strangest figures of nineteenth-century France; his devotion to art, on the one hand, and to humanity, on the other, made of him a paragon for many of the poets of the decades from 1850 to 1900.

Ménard's æsthetic and religious theories are succinctly exposed in the two concluding poems of the *Rêveries d'un païen mystique*, "Hellas" and "Panthéon," from which, by way of conclusion, we may cite a few stanzas. The quotations are given in the simplified spelling which was one of Ménard's *dadas* and which may, in part, have accounted for the poet's unpopularity. "Hellas" is an ecstatic pæan of praise for the civilization of the Greeks, colored by a nostalgic regret.

"Comme ils méritaient bien l'amour d'un peuple libre!
Q'un long concert s'élève autour de leur autel!
Des fêtes et des jeux! qe chaque lire vibre!
La tère ne sera jamais si près du ciel!

La fare qui brillait dans la nuit de l'histoire
S'est éteint pour jamais sous les vents déchainés,
Et le monde vieilli, plongé dans l'ombre noire,
Ne retrouvera plus ses Dieus abandonés.

Ils ne parleront plus dans les bois profétiques,
Le lugubre avenir en vain rapèlera
L'art exilé du monde et les vertus antiques,
Trésors perdus qe nul regret ne nous rendra.

Dieus eureus, q'adorait la jeunesse du monde,
Qe blasfème aujourd'hui la vieille umanité,
Laissez-moi me baigner dans la source féconde
Où la divine Hellas trouva la vérité."⁴

In his more prosaic scientific moments, Ménard was not so certain that the Hellenic civilization alone was the embodiment of the truth which man has been seeking since the dawn of time. Torn between the positivism of science

⁴*Poèmes et rêveries d'un païen mystique*, pp. 317-20.

and the mysticism of religion and poetry, he won through to a pragmatic eclecticism which rather grudgingly admitted that the religions of the world's history have performed a function which science can never even undertake to perform, and so, as in the case of Leconte de Lisle, he chose what seemed to him to be the beautiful elements of all cults and molded them into one. This is the underlying motif of "Panthéon,"⁵ the first stanza of which declares:

"Le temple idéal où vont mes prières
Renferme tous les Dieux que le monde a connus.
Evoqués à la fois dans tous les sanctuaires,
Anciens et nouveaux, tous ils sont venus."

These lines might well serve as the motto of Ménard's life; and it is truly to be regretted that so honest and courageous a thinker, so warm an advocate of the redemption of man, should have today become so completely unknown.

LÉON DIERX

The exotic Ile de Bourbon had seen, in 1818, the birth of Leconte de Lisle; exactly a score of years later, it proved the birthplace of one who was to follow closely in the footsteps of the master and, under his protecting wing, was to develop into a fervent devotee at the shrine of poesy—Léon Dierx. Said by those who knew the two men to bear a striking physical resemblance to Leconte de Lisle, and sharing his æsthetic and humanitarian ideals to a marked degree, Dierx, after completing his studies in Paris and establishing himself there, knew a career of suffering and privation very similar to that of his elder. His family, which had been wealthy, lost its entire fortune in a catastrophe which swept Bourbon in 1868; and compelled to cast about him for a livelihood, he earned a penurious existence first as clerk in a minor railway company and then, through the

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 326-27.

influence of Maupassant, as official in the Ministry of Public Instruction. His life was the drab, uneventful, meager routine of the government employee so graphically pictured in many of the tales of Maupassant. Naturally of a retiring and uncomplaining disposition, he rarely murmured, even when illness came to make his old age doubly burdensome; throughout he bore his cross with the stoical fatalism of a Vigny. The only real recognition accorded him during his lifetime came in 1898 when, upon the death of Mallarmé, Dierx was "elected" to succeed him to the mythical dignity of third "Prince des poètes" (the first having been Verlaine) and he occupied that gratuitous position until his death in 1912, when he was followed by Paul Fort.

This cheerless existence would, in all probability, have been totally intolerable to Dierx had it not been for his love and exercise of the art of poetry. One of the original members of the Leconte de Lisle *salon*, he was, by nature, a practitioner of the lofty and restrained manner of the master, and, as such, one of the most typical of the Parnassians. Leconte de Lisle held Dierx in the highest esteem; and the admiration of pupil for teacher was profound and lasting. "De tous les disciples," Calmettes tells us,¹ "il demeura le plus près du cœur. Son rôle fut d'aimer le maître et de l'aimer avec l'infini respect, l'immense admiration dont son âme compréhensive et tendre est sereinement capable."

Dierx' first book of verse, *Poèmes et poésies*, dedicated "à mon cher et vénéré maître, Leconte de Lisle," was published in 1864; thirty years later, his complete works were issued in two slender volumes, representative poems of which had been included in each of the three collections of *le Parnasse contemporain*. His literary output, thus, had been almost, if not quite, as scanty as that of Heredia; like his Parnassian colleagues, he was reluctant to give to the world verses with whose workmanship he was dissatisfied, and this, coupled with the lack of that leisure so essential for the

¹*Op. cit.*, p. 156.

proper attunement of the mind of the poet to the cosmic harmonies, combined to shackle his creative faculties. His successive collections of verse clearly reveal the stamp of Leconte de Lisle, to whom many of the individual poems are inscribed. The master's penchant for primitive civilizations is reflected in such poems as "la Vision d'Eve," "la Prophétie," a narrative of Mohammedan Stamboul, "Souré-Ha," a tale of the court of Rameses, "Hemrick le veuf," the setting of which is the Brittany of the bards, and "la Femme du chef," a Welsh elegy. Two interesting poems of Biblical tone are "l'Epreuve" and "la Révélation de Jubal," both of which voice the pessimistic prophecy of the final triumph of evil. Indeed, it is in his fatalistic pessimism and his conviction of the pitilessness of Nature, resulting from his own observations of life that Dierx most strikingly resembles Leconte de Lisle. Thus, in "le Soleil couchant," the poet apostrophizes

"Nature indifférente, au secret douloureux,
Prés aux vertes senteurs, forêts aux noirs mystères,
Monts couronnés de pins ou de neiges austères,
Vous êtes sans pitié, comme tous les heureux."²

and *Poèmes et poésies* concludes with the following bitter address to Nature:³

"Non! l'éternelle horreur d'être sans but ni causes
Fait seule tes frissons dans tes métempsycoses!
Tes images, tes bruits, tes parfums, tes saveurs,
Tout cet enchantement de nos esprits rêveurs,
Production des sens, n'est qu'un songe qui passe,
Et qui mourra comme eux, emportant dans l'espace
Ou rendant à tes sourds, noirs et muets travaux,
La chimère des cœurs et l'effort des cerveaux!
Non, ton voile est tombé, tu restes l'Insensible,
L'inerte fiancée, et la Vierge invincible
Que le profanateur s'épuise à violer!
Non! non! tu resplendis sans lui rien révéler
Que la stérilité de ta force infinie
Et le néant d'ouvrir même en toi son génie!"

²*Œuvres complètes* (vol. I, Paris, Lemerre, 1894-96, p. 52).

³"La Vierge," *ibid.*, p. 121.

Again, Nature is the "dolorosa mater," and the poet cries out: "Disperse-moi, Nature insensible, dans ton sein!"⁴ The final poem of Dierx' second collection of verse, *les Lèvres closes* (1867), is a "Marche funèbre" in which a "chœur des derniers hommes" bewails the destruction of matter and spirit.

Hopeless, however, as is Dierx' philosophy of life, there was one ray of light which guided him through the maelstrom of pessimism, the love of his art. For, in the skill with which he handled rhyme-schemes, both simple and complicated, in the beauty and vigor of his tropes, and in the musical feeling that makes of many of his verses sheer melody, Dierx was the genuine artist to whom might be applied his own line, addressed to Gautier: "Tu fus l'amant de la pure beauté."⁵ In "l'Enclume," the poet, consoling himself, exclaims: "Si l'amour t'a fui, l'art te reste,"⁶ and he continues, in words reminiscent of Gautier:

"Toi, cependant, sculpte, cisèle,
En riant, des songes encor,
Et réchauffe-toi de ton zèle
Pour les polir au marteau d'or.

A l'œuvre, forgeron! Rallume
Ton feu, puis souffle avec ardeur!
Mais frappe fort, puisque l'enclume
Malheureux, c'est ton propre cœur!"

In Dierx' last single collection of verse, *les Amants* (1879), the poet strikes the lyric note, but muted by the sordino of his usual restraint; rarely is he rapturous and never sensual. Vocal purity is the keynote of his style; an instance of the melodiousness which he was capable of breathing into his verse is to be found in the following lines from "l'Odeur sacrée":

⁴"Dolorosa mater," *ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵"A Theophile Gautier," *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 191.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

"Dans la douceur du soir, pour ravir le rêveur,
Un rayon plus royal octroyé par faveur
Irradie, arrosant l'horizon qu'il irrise."⁷

As an example of Dierx' finished technique, we may quote "les Etoiles":⁸

"Bien des astres pareils aux foyers palpitants,
Peut-être les plus beaux que chaque soir allume,
Dardent un jeune éclat jusque dans notre brume,
Qui sont des soleils morts, perdus depuis longtemps.

Ceints des tourbillons nés de leurs flammes fécondes,
Ils ont si loin de nous accompli leurs destins,
Que la lumière encor de ces globes éteints
N'a pas toute franchi l'espace plein de mondes.

Et dans l'illusion de leur scintillement,
Nous, parmi tous les feux dont la nuit se constelle,
Nous laissons le plus pur de notre âme immortelle
Monter d'en bas vers eux, peut-être, éperdument.

Ou sereine, ou pensive, ou flamboyante, ou chaste,
O lumière des yeux qui nous charment! Rayons
Qui brûlez tout l'encens que pour vous nous gardions!
Les cœurs sont-ils si loin, l'amour est-il si vaste,

Que la clarté vers qui notre suprême espoir
A travers l'infini de nos désirs s'élance,
Peut-être aussi nous vient du glacial silence
D'un cœur depuis longtemps sombré dans un ciel noir?"

We may best conclude this brief *aperçu* of the work of Léon Dierx with the following tribute from the pen of Catulle Mendès: "Dierx est véritablement un des plus purs et des plus nobles esprits de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle.—La poésie est la fonction naturelle de son âme, et les vers sont la seule langue possible de sa pensée. Il vit dans la rêverie éternelle de la beauté et de l'amour."⁹

⁷*Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 209.

⁸*Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 166–67. The poem is dedicated to L. -X. de Ricard.

⁹*Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, p. 246.

ANATOLE FRANCE

It is an interesting, though not precisely surprising, fact that many of the leading novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century began their literary careers as poets. Alphonse Daudet, Guy de Maupassant, Paul Bourget—representatives of three different types of fictional activity—made their bow to the lettered public with volumes of verse. A similar phenomenon is to be noted in the literary development of the man who was to earn for himself the glory of supremacy in contemporaneous French prose—Anatole France. Born in 1844, François-Anatole Thibault (for that was his actual name) was reared in the bookish atmosphere of his father's antiquarian shop, and was given a solid education at the Jesuit Collège Stanislas, where he was inspired with a whole-hearted admiration for classical antiquity. Shortly after the publication of the first *Parnasse contemporain*, young Thibault was introduced, at the age of twenty-three, into the *salon* of Leconte de Lisle, where, after overcoming the first hesitations of the collegian,¹ he soon took his place as one of the adepts and outspoken advocates of pure poetry, under the interested observation of the master. His poetic inclinations lay in the direction of pagan and early Christian civilization, and were given body in such poems as "la Part de Magdeleine," published in the second *Parnasse*. The recitation of this poem by the talented actress, Agar, at one of the "matinées de poésie" that the Parnassians had begun to organize about 1870, attracted considerable attention to the young Anatole France, who became the guiding spirit of one of the numerous cliques in the *salon*, which numbered among others the talented Nina de Callias, Louis-Xavier de Ricard, and Paul Bourget. The poet and Academician, Pierre de Nolhac, in an interview with Frédéric Lefevre,² makes an interesting

¹For France's reception by the *habitués* of the Leconte de Lisle *salon*, vide Calmettes, *op. cit.*, pp. 295 et seq.

²"Une heure avec M. Pierre de Nolhac" (*les Nouvelles littéraires*, Nov. 27, 1926).

reference to this pre-novelistic Anatole France. "Je l'ai beaucoup aimé," he says of the Parnassian recruit. "Malgré quelques secousses, son amitié m'est restée fidèle jusqu'à la fin. Je l'avais connu avant *Sylvestre Bonnard*. C'était le poète que j'admirais en lui. Je savais par cœur *les Noces corinthiennes*. Nous déjeunions l'un chez l'autre. Il citait mes vers dans *la Vie littéraire* et c'était la gloire. Je reste avec Bourget et Plessis un des rares témoins d'une jeunesse où il y eut tant de grâce, tant de goût pour les lettres. La dernière fois que Francè vint à l'Académie pour voter, nous sommes sortis ensemble en rappelant ce passé si lointain, ces journées de Versailles et les ombrages de Trianon qu'il n'oubliait pas." The title of France's first volume of verse, *Poèmes dorés*,³ properly qualifies the polished Parnassianism of the young bard. Continuing in the same vein, France published, in the third *Parnasse contemporain*, the first part of his dramatic poem, *les Noces corinthiennes*, which was soon issued in its entirety, together with four additional poems, in book form. In these two volumes, France amply demonstrated his acceptance of the doctrine of Gautier and Banville, generously practiced also by Leconte de Lisle, that "c'est assez de peindre en poésie,"⁴ a theory which was to serve the Symbolists as starting-point for their conception of poetry as primarily melodious sound, independent of meaning. Having reached this stage of high poetic promise, France, chafing at the restraints imposed upon the art by the rigoristic Leconte de Lisle, suddenly abandoned poetry and gave himself over to the perfection of that prose style which was to make him, after the death of Renan, the recognized peer of the *prosateurs* of his day. France's earlier esteem for Leconte de Lisle was severely shaken by the latter's intransigence towards the Symbolist rebels against Parnassianism, and the younger man left the fold never to return.⁵

³Paris, Lemerre, 1873.

⁴Quoted by Calmettes, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁵Huret, in an appendix to his *Enquête*, prints an epistolary skirmish between Leconte de Lisle and Anatole France occasioned by an unfavorable critical essay of the latter which threatened to precipitate a

Anatole France's two slender volumes of verse reveal throughout the imprint of Leconte de Lisle, of a Leconte de Lisle, however, less sombre, less fatalistic, less weighed down by the stern insensibility of the Hindu sage, more buoyant with the pagan love of life and beauty. The *Poèmes dorés*, as the name indicates, is a collection of highly-gilded poems which, like the *Emaux et camées* of Gautier and so many of the volumes of the Parnassians, sparkle like gems and, like gems, shed no warmth. In emulation of the master, France is the *animalier* in such poems as "les Cerfs," "la Mort du singe," "le Perdrix"; the painter of nature-pictures in "les Arbres," "le Chêne abandonné," "Marine"; the reconstructor of ancient civilizations in "la Fille de Caïn" and "Homaï." Though, as in Leconte de Lisle, the personal note is now and then sounded, it is so muffled, so restrained that it would seem to come from anywhere but the heart of the poet. "Le Bûcher de santal" offers an excellent instance of the cameo-like nature of many of these poems:⁶

"Cependant qu'à travers l'océan Pacifique
Un Anglais naviguait, morose et magnifique,
Dans une île odorante, où son brick aborda,
Une reine, une enfant qui se nommait Tit-da,
Lui jeta ses colliers de brillants coquillages,
Prête à le suivre, esclave, en ses lointains voyages;
Et, pendant trente nuits, son jeune sein cuivré
Battit d'amour joyeux près de l'hôte adoré,
Dans des murs de bambou, sur la natte légère.
Mais avant que finît cette lune si chère,
Pour l'abandon prévu, douce, d'un cœur égal,
Elle avait fait dresser un bûcher de santal;
Et, du brick qui lofait, lui, pâle, sans surprise,
Vit la flamme et sentit le parfum dans la brise."

The apparent feelinglessness of this poem is strongly reminiscent of the Leconte de Lisle of "la Mort de Valmiki";

duel. The incident, robbed of its serious eventualities by the good sense of the younger man, now seems highly amusing.

⁶*Poèmes dorés* (*Poésies d'Anatole France*—Paris, Lemerre, n.d., pp. 97-98).

and the master himself might have written the verses which conclude "les Affinités":⁷

"Tes sens, féconds naguère en exquises souffrances,
Ta forme, douce aux yeux, étaient des apparences.
Le corps n'est rien de plus; l'esprit seul est réel."

It is in the dramatic poem, *les Noces corinthiennes*, that France sounded in diapason the paganism which links him, in this respect, to Théodore de Banville rather than to Leconte de Lisle, and which was to remain one of his dominant traits throughout life. In flawlessly marmoreal verses, he recounts an episode based upon the clash between the pagan and the early Christian religions. The poet's own predilection is clearly reflected in a dedicatory poem to Hellas, the land of love, of light, of youth, and of beauty. The poem is Chateaubriand's *Atala* in a Greek setting. The beautiful heroine, Daphne, though accepting the Christianity which her mother, Kallista, has imposed upon her, is eager for the day when she will be joined in marriage to Hippias, as handsome and as joyous as the gods whom he worships. But Kallista, ill unto death, solemnly consecrates her daughter to the divine spouse, and Daphne, grief-stricken yet obedient, declares her acceptance of the vow with the bitter utterance: "Réjouis-toi, Dieu triste à qui plaît la souffrance."⁸ Hippias, overflowing with passion, comes to claim his bride; she at first remains steadfast to her mother's oath, then weakens and admits that she still loves, and finally, in order to avoid betraying either her heavenly or her mortal lover, she swallows a deadly poison only a few moments before the arrival of the bishop, Theognis, with the offer to dissolve the vow. With its antithesis of pagan radiance and Christian austerity, the dramatic poem is typical of Parnassianism at its most finished;⁹ and it was probably because its author felt that he

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹*Les Noces corinthiennes* is dedicated, as a whole, to Frédéric Plessis, and the three parts individually to Henri Cazalis, Emmanuel

was incapable of finer efforts in verse that he abandoned poetry for criticism and fiction.¹⁰

SULLY PRUDHOMME

The poetry of the Leconte de Lisle Parnassians, it has been emphasized, in its effort to avoid the often mawkish subjectivity of Lamartine, Musset, and their imitators, had taken refuge in the past, in the folklore, the mythology, the religion, and the philosophy of young civilizations. This refusal to find interest in the life of the time was, to a large degree, concomitant with a pessimistic disbelief in the value of that life, in its several manifestations, and resulted in an exaltation of death, or at least of that state of complete self-annihilation and fusion with the macrocosm which the Hindus term the Nirvana. "La poésie parnassienne," says one critic,¹ "est le chant de la mort qui enveloppe le chant de la vie." This dictum, it will soon become evident, was principally true of the Leconte de Lisle section of Parnassus (the Baudelaireans practiced it in a somewhat altered form), and not all the members of this "imperium in imperio" remained consistent devotees of the cult of death. Scarcely a single Parnassian, however, would have refused to accept as axiomatic the further statement of the same critic to the effect that "la mort est plus forte que la vie mais l'art est plus fort que la mort."² One of the most typical examples of those poets who began their careers under the auspices of *le Parnasse contemporain* and, more especially, of Leconte de Lisle, and who, though before very long leaving the wings of the master, never abandoned,

des Essarts, and Paul Bourget, respectively. Cazalis and des Essarts were members of the original Parnassian group, while Plessis and Bourget, mentioned in the Nolhac interview cited above, were among the disciples of Anatole France the poet.

¹⁰Desonay, in his chapter on Anatole France, *op. cit.*, chap. V, pays a very eloquent tribute to the author of *les Noces corinthiennes*. This eulogy is resumed in the very last paragraphs of the volume, p. 420.

¹E. Zyromski: *la Poésie de Sully Prudhomme* (Paris, Colin, 1907, p. 43).

²*Ibid.*, p. 48.

simply readjusted, their ideal of perfection in art, deserves our attention at this point. We are referring to Sully Prudhomme.

René-François-Armand Prudhomme was born at Paris in 1839 and died there sixty-eight years later. When the poet was still a child, he lost his father, a wealthy merchant, and the mother gave her son the nickname, "Sully," which the elder Prudhomme had, for some unexplained reason, borne. Sully Prudhomme's youth seems to have been none too happy and throughout his life his health was delicate. As a *lycéen*, he received, as a prospective student at the Ecole polytechnique, a thorough scientific grounding, which definitely shaped his philosophy of life and was to be constantly reflected in his poetry. Forced by a malady of the eyes to abandon the profession of engineering, he took up the study of law, which he soon found distasteful, and as he had been left in easy circumstances by a timely inheritance, he decided to adopt the career of letters. His first volume of verse appeared, under the title of *Stances et poèmes*, in 1865; this was followed by *les Epreuves* (1868), *les Solitudes* (1869), *les Vaines tendresses* (1875), two lengthy philosophical poems, *la Justice* (1878) and *le Bonheur* (1888), and *les Epaves* (1908), a posthumous volume composed largely of poems written in the early sixties. The poetic achievement of Sully Prudhomme was rewarded, in 1881, by election to the French Academy; and in 1901, the poet received the distinction of the award of the Nobel prize for literature. In his declining years, Sully Prudhomme crystallized his speculations along æsthetic and metaphysical lines in several prose works, which include *le Testament poétique* (1900), *la Vraie religion selon Pascal* (1905), and *la Psychologie du libre arbitre* (1906). An uneventful existence had been that of the poet, as measured by contacts with the world of action, but the sum total of his published work bears irrefutable testimony to the vigor and profundity of the inner life which he had led for upward of a half-century.

Sully Prudhomme began his poetic career as a novice on the foothills of Parnassus. He was in his early twenties when he was introduced into the *salon* of Leconte de Lisle, and the gentle amiability of his nature, although it contrasted sharply with the rather pugilistic combativeness of these neophytes of the religion of art, earned him the respect of his colleagues. His earliest poems (he had begun versifying at the age of twenty) reflect mildly the spirit of Lamartine, but his first published volume decidedly bears the Parnassian impress, in the delicate finish of workmanship, the emotional restraint, and the Hellenic sensitiveness to the external manifestations of beauty characteristic of the poems. The oft-cited "le Vase brisé,"³ perhaps Sully Prudhomme's most perfect example of Parnassian elegiac verse, bears re-quoting:

"Le vase où meurt cette verveine
D'un coup d'éventail fut fêlé;
Le coup dut effleurer à peine:
Aucun bruit ne l'a révélé.

Mais la légère meurtrissure,
Mordant le cristal chaque jour,
D'une marche invisible et sûre
En a fait lentement le tour.

Son eau fraîche a fui goutte à goutte,
Le suc des fleurs s'est épuisé;
Personne encor ne s'en doute;
N'y touchez pas, il est brisé.

Souvent aussi la main qu'on aime
Effleurant le cœur, le meurtrit;
Puis le cœur se fend de lui-même,
La fleur de son amour périt;

Toujours intact aux yeux du monde,
Il sent croître et pleurer tout bas
Sa blessure fine et profonde;
Il est brisé, n'y touchez pas."

³*Stances et poèmes (Œuvres, Paris, Lemerre, n.d., vol. I, pp. 13-14).*

But the poet soon became dissatisfied with the Leconte de Lislean ideal of a poetry whose main purpose was the pictorial evocation of the external world; in later years, he objected strenuously against being known exclusively as the poet of "le Vase brisé." In the words of Zyromski: "Pour Sully Prudhomme, la poésie n'est plus une représentation, mais doit être une aspiration. . . . L'esthétique du Parnasse est une esthétique de sculpteurs et de peintres: la doctrine de Sully Prudhomme est d'un poète philosophique."⁴ He soon abandoned, therefore, "le culte prédominant de l'art," shook off "l'effet accablant de cette mélancolie qui assombrit les conclusions de la doctrine Parnassienne."⁵ Turning more and more within himself, Sully Prudhomme left the *salon* of Leconte de Lisle towards 1870, never to return, and gave himself to an examination of the great moral and ethical problems. "A l'enchantement de l'art, décidément provisoire, il a préféré l'angoisse de la recherche, et son audace a reçu sa récompense car il a trouvé le repos, dans une doctrine solide et belle."⁶ Even during his early sojourn on Parnassus, Sully Prudhomme had been troubled by metaphysical self-questionings. His state of mind at this period is well expressed in a brief poem called "Intus":⁷

"Deux voix s'élèvent tour à tour
Des profondeurs troubles de l'âme
La raison blasphème, et l'amour
Rêve un dieu juste et le proclame.

Panthéiste, athée, ou chrétien,
Tu connais leurs luttes obscures;
C'est mon martyre, et c'est le tien,
De vivre avec ces deux murmures.

L'intelligence dit au cœur:
'Le monde n'a pas un bon père.
Vois, le mal est partout vainqueur!
Le cœur dit: 'Je crois et j'espère.

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 54, 58.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷*Stances et poèmes (Œuvres, vol. I, pp. 40-41).*

Espère, o ma soeur, crois un peu:
C'est à force d'aimer qu'on trouve;
Je suis immortel, je sens Dieu.
L'intelligence lui dit: 'Prouve.'

This note of philosophical inquiry is uppermost in Sully Prudhomme's second collection of poems, *les Epreuves*, and grows stronger with advancing years. The volume is subdivided into four groups of sonnets, entitled respectively "Amour," "Doute," "Rêve," "Action." It is in the second of these categories that we find the poet wrestling with the torments of doubt. This struggle is admirably described in "la Lutte," an especially fine sonnet, and in "le Doute," quoted earlier in these pages.⁸ Having found only suffering in love and no solution of his intellectual problems in metaphysics or religion, the poet at first seeks refuge in the *laissez-allér* of revery, and accepts the Leconte de Lislean interpretation of the phenomenal world.

"Et tu l'as dit, ce monde, après tout, n'est qu'un rêve.
Fantôme insaisissable à qui l'a médité,
Apparence cruelle et sans solidité
Où l'idéal s'ébauche et jamais ne s'achève."⁹

But this sterile inactivity soon proves intolerable to the poet and he determines to plunge into the world of action, to assist struggling humanity in its striving after the ideal of justice and happiness. "Homo sum" stirringly describes this awakening; its closing lines run:

"Quelque chose de l'homme a traversé mon âme,
Et j'ai tous les soucis de la fraternité."¹⁰

For the remainder of his poetic career, we find Sully Prudhomme wavering between the neo-romantic verse of the Parnassians and the philosophical poetry of the thinker.

⁸Vide chap. IV, p. 63.

⁹*Les Epreuves* (*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 43).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 55.

Certainly one of his strongest claims to the attention of posterity was his practice of what one critic has, somewhat inaccurately, called a "genre nouveau dont il est le créateur et vraiment encore le seul représentant,"¹¹ scientific poetry.¹² Reared as a devout Catholic and even passing through a religious crisis during which he thought of preparing himself for entrance into the order of Dominican monks, Sully Prudhomme soon lost, as a result of his interest in the sciences, his certainty of the truth of revealed religion. As early as 1859, he undertook a verse translation of Lucretius' *De Rerum natura*, of which he actually completed and published one canto; the influence of the great Roman materialist, combined with that of the idealism of Kant, under whose sway he remained throughout his life, resulted in a sort of skeptical pessimism which at times, as in the case of Leconte de Lisle, bordered perilously upon complete intellectual nihilism. There was, however, a strong strain of the mystical in the poet, who, in his conflict between rational science and religion, shows a resemblance to Pascal, and so he succeeded at arriving at a philosophy of life which, as he says himself, was not a definite system,¹³ and which might roughly be compared with the pragmatism of William James.

The duality of Sully Prudhomme's poetic penchants pursued a parallel course until the philosophico-scientific gained the upper hand and the poet virtually ceased writing in verse. In his posthumous volume, *les Epaves*,¹⁴ for example, there are thoroughly Parnassian poems—restrained lyrics, nature-paintings,—on the one hand, and, on the other, compositions, written as early as 1862, with such titles as "Descartes," "Science et poésie," "la Science," "Après la lecture de Kant," "les Dieux s'en vont," and

¹¹C. Hémon: *la Philosophie de Sully Prudhomme* (Paris, Alcan, 1907, p. 12).

¹²Louis Bouilhet's "les Fossiles," a lengthy scientific poem dedicated to Flaubert, appeared in his *Festons et astragales*, a volume which antedated *Stances et poèmes* by six years.

¹³*Ibid.*, préface de M. Sully Prudhomme, p. 1.

¹⁴*Œuvres*, vol. VI.

others, in which the poet's desire to know is at grips with his longing to believe. The group of poems called "Croquis italiens,"¹⁵ some of which are to be found in the second *Parnasse contemporain*, are entirely in the pictorial manner, as are many of *les Solitudes* (which contains the celebrated "le Cygne") and *les Vaines tendresses*¹⁶ (this latter also shows the scars of an unhappy love affair of the poet's youth). But together with *les Vaines tendresses* is bound a poem called "le Zénith,"¹⁷ dedicated to the victims of the catastrophe which overtook the balloon of that name, in which the poet marvels at the courage with which modern man, with the aid of science, is probing deeper and deeper into the unknown. And after 1878, Sully Prudhomme's attention is more and more devoted to the consideration of metaphysical problems. In "la Justice," a poem in eleven "veillées" or "watches," the poet takes the Diogenes-lantern of reason in search of justice. He fails to find it in the relations between the species, between individuals, between the cosmic spheres. Substituting for the lantern of reason the lamp of the heart, the poet finds the existence of the conscience irrefragable proof of the fact that the universe is animated by the idea of justice and ends with the conviction that the dignity of mankind as well as the gropings of science make for sympathy in human relations and that man, as a social animal, will always act in such a manner as to safeguard this dignity. The first half of this poem is far more convincing than its sequel, and the poet is evidently forcing conclusions that would preserve him from the reef of nihilism. The same logical insufficiency is to be found in Sully Prudhomme's second philosophical poem, "le Bonheur," which is an extended dialogue, in twelve cantos, carried on in the realms of Elysium, between Faustus and Stella, who, having loved but remained chaste on earth, are now prepared for the bliss of a celestial union.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, vol. II (bound with *les Epaves* and *les Solitudes*).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, vol. III.

¹⁷Printed in the third *Parnasse contemporain*.

The cries of agonizing humanity, however, pierce through the azure firmament to the ears of Faustus, and he decides to shake off the lethargy of self-centred happiness to answer these cries. Stella refuses to let him go alone, and, hand in hand, they wend their way back to earth, only to find that death has traveled faster than they and that the race of men has been annihilated. Thereupon they set themselves the heroic task of engendering a new race which should be permeated with the ideals of justice and brotherly love.

Critics are in accord that these rather long-winded, metaphysically unconvincing poems of Sully Prudhomme are interesting merely as ventures in a new field and will not stand the test of time so successfully as will his shorter lyrics in the Parnassian mould. Be that as it may, it must be insisted that, in whatever Sully Prudhomme tried his poetic gifts, he was always governed by the "souci de l'art," and that he represented the highest strivings of the epoch in elegiac, pictorial, and metaphysical poetry. And in his anxious endeavor to reconcile the heart and the mind, mysticism and science, the emotions and reason, Sully Prudhomme, bravely seeking the higher implications of the researches of the Darwinian generation, perhaps deserves to be called, as Brunetière has called him, the only genuine philosophical poet of his time.¹⁸ Whether philosophy and poetry can, or should, be made to walk hand in hand is a question for the individual to answer. Certain it is that the Parnassians, as a whole, were little concerned with far-reaching metaphysical inquiry and that they would probably have denied the name of poetry to such works as "la Justice" and "le Bonheur." Sully Prudhomme, thus, after beginning as the true product of his age, struck out boldly into untried paths and climbed to heights whose intellectual atmosphere was far too rarefied for the majority of his original colleagues. In considering the work of such Parnassians as Banville, Baudelaire, and their disciples, we shall be in a better position to judge of the chasm which separated them from Sully Prudhomme.

¹⁸Vide *Histoire et littérature*, vol. II, pp. 226-27.

CATULLE MENDES

In an earlier chapter of this study, emphasis was laid upon the rôle of Catulle Mendès as the practical genius of the *Parnasse* group. It was also seen that Mendès did not confine himself to supporting and editing "journaux parnassiens," but that he was at the same time, a liberal contributor to these periodicals. As a matter of fact, Mendès was an exceedingly prolific writer, to the point of being a mere polygraph; a bibliography of his works from 1863 to 1900, compiled by himself, includes volumes of verse, novels, plays, short-stories, sketches, studies in criticism, and libretti for pantomimes, operas, and comic operas.¹ Throughout this bristling literary career, Mendès remained faithful to the ideals of the original Parnassian group, most of whom he survived, so that he has been styled by Vance Thompson "the last of the Parnassians."² But Mendès, whom another critic has contemptuously dubbed, "gymnaste des mots, tambourinaire des Parnassiens,"³ had little or no originality; he imitated, according to the mood in which he found himself, Victor Hugo,⁴ Heinrich Heine, and especially Leconte de Lisle and Banville. His activity, however, served as a constant stimulus to the truly gifted members of the group, and, what is perhaps more important, his influence was always at the disposal of, and his generously lined purse wide open in, the interests of Parnassianism. It is fitting that he should serve as the vehicle of transition from the chapter on Leconte de Lisle to that on Banville.

¹Vide *Dictionnaire bibliographique et critique des principaux poètes du XIX siècle*, which serves as appendix to his *Mouvement poétique français* (pp. 288-89). The bibliography lists over a hundred and ten titles.

²*French Portraits* (New York, Mitchell Kennerly, 1913, p. 73).

³E. Magne: *le Cyrano de l'histoire* (Paris, Dujarric, 1903, preface, p. XVII).

⁴On this point, vide Barbey d'Aurevilly's essay on Mendès (*les Œuvres et les hommes*, Paris, Lemerre, n.d., pp. 257-70). We are told, among other things, that "Victor Hugo est littérairement le père de M. Catulle Mendès" (p. 260).

In his *Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, Mendès recounts the Odyssey of the struggling young poets who were to make up the Parnassian group. We have seen that, after Mendès' fine and imprisonment for the publication of his "Roman d'une nuit" in the *Revue fantaisiste*, he had been cut off temporarily by his wealthy father. This was the beginning of a brief "attic period," during which Mendès shared the Bohemian joys and sorrows so common to poets of all ages. Settling himself in an apartment in the hôtel du Brésil, on the "rive gauche," satirically referred to by his enemies as "l'hôtel du Dragon bleu," Mendès weathered the period of parental disfavor by the composition of poems and by the cultivation of the friendship of numerous kindred spirits, to whom he offered guidance and encouragement. Mendès' first volume of verse, *Philoméla* (1863), though its author later looked upon it condescendingly as an "œuvre de jeunesse," was warmly praised by his co-workers, and may be considered one of the milestones in the early history of Parnassianism. So much at least might be said for the volume: it was imbued with a "très honnête et très fier amour de l'art et des belles formes, le soin de la langue et le souci du rythme."⁵ These qualities, to which Mendès remained faithful throughout, stamp him as unmistakably Parnassian, so that, though he may have been lacking in profundity and originality, he was at least the soul of consistency. And his deficiencies were almost, if not quite, covered over by a prodigious talent for versification that gave his verse much of the coruscating brilliance of the poetry of Banville. His propensity to imitation is clearly seen in his second collection of verse, *Sérénades*, in which the joint influence of Heine and of Spanish student song is frankly avowed. Thus, the conclusion of the "Finale" of the collection runs:

"Et bercé d'un souffle qui vole
De Weimar à Valladolid,
J'ai joué les airs de mon lied
Sur une guitare espagnole."⁶

⁵*Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, p. 160.

⁶*Pantéléia, Sérénades, Pagode* (Paris, Ollendorff, 1885, p. 54).

The era of privation was short-lived for Mendès, and he was soon receiving his fellow-poets in a sumptuous apartment in the rue de Douai. It was at about this time that the junction between the Mendès group and that of Leconte de Lisle was effected. How the *Parnasse contemporain* was, at least in part, the result of this amalgamation, we have already seen; all that need be added here is that Mendès looked up to Leconte de Lisle as the absolute monarch and the infallible judge of the group; and his references to the author of the *Poèmes antiques*, although, like Heredia, he could not understand his lack of sympathy for the generation of the Symbolists, are aglow with a reverence which borders on hero-worship. From 1860 until his accidental death in the St.-Germain railway tunnel in 1909, at the age of sixty-eight, Mendès remained a faithful communicant at the altar of letters.

The characteristic in the poetry of the Parnassians which has received the loudest praise and the bitterest censure is their prestidigitation as versifiers. The *tricks of force* of rhyme and rhythm which mark their verses seem frequently little short of miraculous. This preoccupation with poetic sleight-of-hand, however, naturally precluded concern with content; the poet on the look-out for audacious rhymes and rhyme-schemes will have little energy left to incorporate philosophical concepts into his dazzling array of words and sounds. In the case of the greatest of the Parnassians, the reader has to unravel the really meaningful content from the prosodic labyrinth; with the weaker imitators, the labyrinth is there, but it is empty. It is for this reason that the entire Parnassian group has so often, with undue exaggeration, been dubbed "clowns" of poetry. But if any one member of the group deserved that epithet, it was Catulle Mendès. Indeed, Barbey d'Aurevilly, in discussing Mendès' story, *le Roman d'un clown*, says of him: "M. Catulle Mendès est un acrobate littéraire, aussi robustement souple et aussi téméraire que son clown."⁷ A glance

⁷*Loc. cit.*, p. 267.

at one volume of Mendès' poetry will enable us to draw some conclusions as to the justice of this statement.

The *Poésies nouvelles*⁸ of Mendès may be used to serve us with instances of the man's ingenious talents. Here we find him, one moment, writing in the macabre strain of Baudelaire, as in "la Rôdeuse," and, the next, wantoning, a French Anacreon, in the embraces of his innumerable loves. "Récapitulation," for example, is a poem consisting exclusively in an enumeration of the names of former mistresses—about seventy-five, and, adds the poet mischievously, "j'en oublie."⁹ "Les Doubles noces" out-Boccaccios the *Decameron*; a novice vows a candle to the Virgin if she will send her a man that night; the next morning she burns two candles. One group of poems in the volume is called "les Vaines amours" and includes a number of compositions in the musical rondeau form in praise of various past mistresses of the poet's heart. Another group has as its caption, "Lieds et menus poèmes." In fact, it is in the "menu poème" that Mendès' amazing dexterity is most amply displayed. Here he shows himself as cleverly epigrammatic and as skillful in the handling of rhyme-schemes and the forging of rhymes as he is lascivious and totally shallow in subject-matter. The poet is slave to a hyperfondness for metaphors which frequently smack of preciousity. Thus, in a poem entitled "les Confusions possibles," the last lines of six three-verse stanzas read: "Astres, ou tes yeux"; "Roses, ou tes lèvres"; "Perles, ou tes dents"; "Griffe, ou ta caresse"; "Aile, ou ton caprice"; "Glaçon, ou ton coeur."¹⁰ Poetic licenses abound, and the audacity manifested in the rhymes would be striking were it not the merest imitation of Banville. In "la Victoire d'avril," we find this stanza:

⁸Paris, Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1892 (vol. III of *Poésies complètes*).

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 253.

"Ou bien, chère, si notre idylle,
Sans regret de boudoir ni d'île,
A jamais est close, dis-le."¹¹

Or again, in "Mythologie foraine":

"J'offre, afin d'achalander ma
Baraque que l'on acclama
Hélène pour belle Fatma."¹²

And, finally, an example in which the rhyme is carried over from one stanza to the next (the first two strophes of "l'Odelette au baiser"):

"C'est toi, Baiser, c'est toi qui vaux
Qu'on vive! Les plus durs travaux
Je les veux pour l'amour de vos

Bouches, ah! de vos doucereuses
Bouches, ah! de vos chaleureuses
Bouches, ah! de vos valeureuses

Bouches, etc."¹³

Especially noticeable is Mendès' susceptibility to the music of sounds; many of his poems are mere successions of sonorities which have to be read three or four times before any meaning (such as there is) emerges; favorite tricks for obtaining musical effects are the cumulation of nasals and liquids, especially in the rhyming syllables, and the use of internal rhyme. Examine such instances as the following: "La câline, féline, et serpentine ligne" (from "A la femme au masque");¹⁴ or the first two stanzas of "Nuit féérique":

"Sur la lisière où l'ombre abonde
Menez la ronde vagabonde,
Fée Oriane ou fée Habonde.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 149.

Epanouissez sous les branches
Du bouleau qui penche les blanches
Incandescences de vos hanches."¹⁵

If it is not entirely fair to Mendès to judge his poetic merits by toyings of this sort, it may be stated, in defense of such a procedure, that where he essays the serious or lofty strain, he is so palpably modeling himself upon Hugo and Leconte de Lisle that he seems a mere echo, and that his Muse is happier in her Banvillesque clownings than in her wanderings through the antediluvian universe.

But whatever may be our estimate of the poet Mendès, there can be little doubt of his purely human significance in the history of French literature during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The son of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, baptized unpremeditatedly by some priests in the gutter of a Naples street, the husband of "l'unique Parnassienne," Judith Gautier, whom he married against the wishes and without the consent of her illustrious father, this fictionesque individual, whom one critic calls a "mythe"¹⁶ and whom his enemies nicknamed "Canule" and "Capsule," was endowed with a vigorous and lovable personality which made of him a born leader and fighter and earned him a host of friends and admirers. Ever championing the cause of literature, reverent of the old and tolerant of the young, with a mind always open for the recognition of genius in others and a purse unloosed for the assistance of poverty-stricken artists, Mendès seems to have been the idol of his generation. Numerous are the tales of financial aid rendered or influence employed for the alleviation of the hardships of fellow-poets; to this Leconte de Lisle and Léon Dierx, among many others, might well testify. Many were the geniuses whom Mendès unearthed or encouraged; to this Richard Wagner and lesser lights like François Coppée and Albert Glatigny might bear witness.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁶Vide H. Clouard: *la Poésie française moderne* (Paris, Gauthier-Villars, 1924, p. 44).

When the Parnassians had been forced off the stage by their Symbolist-Decadent offsprings, Mendès lent a willing ear to the vagaries of vers-librists and the legion of other "ists" who fairly spawned at the end of the century.¹⁷ And without his organizing genius and his untiring efforts in the cause of letters, Parnassus might never have been transported into France. From the *Revue fantaisiste*, through the *Parnasse contemporain*, to *la République des lettres*, Mendès opened wide the doors of literary hospitality and gave shelter to writers who, lacking this encouragement, might never have struggled on to the heights which they attained. Recent French literature might, indeed, have lost much in the way of color and brio had it not been for the unflagging zeal and the disinterested labors of Catulle Mendès.

¹⁷Mendès seems to have felt, however, that, by the publication of his *Rapport sur le mouvement poétique français* in 1903, he was dealing Symbolism the fatal blow and was thereby paving the way for the accession to power of some sort of neo-Parnassianism.

CHAPTER SIX

THEODORE DE BANVILLE AND HIS DISCIPLES

Earlier in this study, exception was taken to the habit of students of nineteenth-century French poetry of discussing the Parnassian group as though it were an *ensemble* made up of individuals identically minded on matters pertaining to art and life. It was pointed out that many critics who speak of the *Parnasse* are thinking almost exclusively of Leconte de Lisle and those who were most definitely influenced by him, and so we find the entire group labeled with such terms as impassibility, intellectual nihilism, æsthetic iciness. As a matter of fact, as has been demonstrated, these terms can not be applied without reservations even to Leconte de Lisle and his "inner circle." In the remaining chapters it will be shown that Parnassianism was not of a piece, that it was a many-faceted gem, of which Leconte de Lisle represented chiefly the harder angles and those throwing the more sombre shadows. That the gem was capable of sparkling in the sunlight, of appearing to be wreathed in smiles, is evidenced by the work of the poet to whom we shall now turn, Théodore de Banville.

Here, too, a warning note must at once be sounded. Like Leconte de Lisle, Banville has also suffered from criticisms based upon insufficient acquaintance, so that one aspect of his nature has been emphasized to the almost total exclusion of other, equally important, phases. So keen a student of contemporaneous French literature as Jules Lemaître was guilty of this fallacy of arguing from the particular to the general in characterizing Banville as "le plus amusé et dans ses bons jours le plus amusant des Romantiques, un clown en poésie, qui a eu dans sa vie plusieurs idées dont la plus persistante a été de ne jamais exprimer une idée dans ses vers."¹ And though Lemaître

¹*Les Contemporains* (première série, 16th edition, Paris, Lecène et Oudin, 1892, p. 7).

later considerably modified the harshness of this judgment,² the impression has persisted to this day that Banville was a mere juggler of rhymes and that his work is totally devoid of ideas. It will be our effort to determine the exact measure of truth to be found in such dicta concerning Banville.

In the first place, it should be stated at the outset that Banville was primarily the poet of the sheer joy of living. To be sure, he soon learned full well that life grants with all too sparing a hand its moments of joy, and the note of disillusioned sadness is never long absent from his verses. But the point to be remembered is that he wanted passionately to experience the joy of living and to reproduce it in his poetry. Artistic to the very roots of his being, he found himself entirely out of tune with the money-grubbing materialism of his epoch and, like the Romanticists of whom he might be called a belated survivor,³ he sought to escape the time in which he lived and to find happiness in a world of his own creating. Now, for Banville, the happiest era in the history of mankind was that of the pre-Aristotelian gods and heroes, of painters and sculptors, of the *kalos kagathos*, the man who was "beautiful and good," that is, beautiful therefore good. And so, turning his back upon the uninspired prose of a Scribe and what to him seemed the soulless pseudo-classicism of seventeenth and eighteenth century France, he bathed himself in the radiance of classical antiquity and its reflection that was the Renaissance. Banville, like Louis Ménard, was a true Hellene, a pagan in the best sense of the word, and, unlike Ménard, he concentrated his attention upon the attainment of the Hellenic ideal in art. That he always achieved this ideal even the most enthusiastic of his sympathizers would perforce deny,

²Vide *Impressions de théâtre*, vol. 10 (4th edition, Paris, Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1898, article on Banville's "comédie féerique," *Riquet à la Houppe*, pp. 375-86).

³Lanson, in his *Histoire de la littérature française*, 14th edition, Paris, Hachette, 1918, p. 1059) says of him: "Ce délicieux acrobate finit le romantisme."

but to overlook his ambition and to pass him scornfully by as a "delightful acrobat" is to do him a grave injustice.⁴ And whatever he may have failed to accomplish, one achievement must stand to his everlasting merit—his resuscitation of the verse-forms employed by the poets of pre-classical France, Charles d'Orléans, Villon, and Ronsard, and thrown into the discard by the yardstick regulations of the poetically impotent Malherbe. But let us first learn something of the life of this second of the masters of the Parnassians.

Théodore Faullain de Banville was born at Moulins, in that province of central France known as the Bourbonnais, on March 14, 1823. On the paternal side, he was descended from a Norman family which had been ennobled by Louis XIV; his mother, however, was of pure Bourbonnais stock. This offspring of two important provinces of France spent practically his entire life in Paris; for, at the age of seven, he was put to school in the capital. His elementary education completed, he entered the *Ecole de Droit*, but, as he himself tells us, he was far more interested, even at this early age, in "odes" than in "codes," and he never seriously harbored the thought of engaging in legal practice. His first verses were written at sixteen; and in them the youthful bard reflected his readings in the literature of classical antiquity, in the French poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and in the Romanticists, whom he knew by heart. It would seem to have been the ambition of his mother, from whom he inherited the exuberance of his nature, that he devote himself to a career of letters. In any case, he was permitted to withdraw from the *Ecole de Droit* and to spend his time largely as he pleased. It was not long before he had associated himself with a group of young writers, some of whom, notably Charles Baudelaire and

⁴To Max Fuchs, the author of a painstaking biographical and critical study of Banville (Paris, Cornély, 1912), great credit is due for making, and in a scholarly manner proving, the point that the poet was far more than a mere "rimeur sans idées" (vide "Avant-propos," p. VII).

Henri Murger, were to carve their names in large letters upon the history of nineteenth century French literature. This band, which met frequently at the apartment of Banville's parents in the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, that quaint old street in the Latin Quarter which extends from the Boulevard Saint-Germain to the "Boul' Mich'" was animated by a fierce hatred for the *bourgeois* and for everything that smacked of the philistine. It was to the accompaniment of the plaudits of this *cénacle* that, at the age of nineteen, Banville published his first volume of verse, *les Cariatides*. Though clearly the work of a novice still in the imitative phase who might have altered the well-known declaration of Hugo to read: "Je veux être Victor Hugo ou rien,"⁵ the volume showed remarkable promise and was praised by no less a poet than Alfred de Vigny. It was followed four years later by a second collection of poems, *les Stalactites*, in which Banville, though by no means out of debt to his predecessors, was patently striking out for himself. In order to assure himself the material comfort necessary to enable him to practice his profession of poet, Banville now, as Gautier had already done, joined the ranks of literary journalist; at first he wrote the *feuilleton* and contributed verses to such ephemeral periodicals as *la Silhouette*, *le Corsaire*, *Mendès' Revue fantaisiste*, and the Goncourt brothers' *Paris*; then he wrote a series of sketches for *le Figaro* which were later published in book-form. That his Muse was not inactive during these years is evidenced by the fact that, in 1857, the poems written since the appearance of *les Stalactites* were assembled and issued in three separate volumes; of these *les Odes funambulesques*—"tight-rope-walking odes," a type invented by Banville—was to enjoy an immediate success and to earn its author the sweepingly-applied epithet of "clown en poésie" which clung to him for the remainder of his life despite the appearance of volumes of serious verse, notably *les Exilés* (1867). It was during this period that Banville

⁵As a youth, Hugo is said to have declared: "Je veux être Chateaubriand ou rien."

established his contacts with Leconte de Lisle and the younger Parnassians, whom he often entertained at his home and in whose company he frequented the *salon* of the older master; the editing of the second *Parnasse contemporain* was largely the work of Banville. From 1867 until his death in 1893, he wrote indefatigably; there flowed from his pen a steady stream of volumes, not of verse alone, but also of tales, essays, sketches, and plays. The old age of the poet, as had been virtually his entire life, was serene and untroubled; he had been filled with a throbbing love of life which excluded only the morals and æsthetics of the *bourgeoisie*; and he died in the same undaunted faith in the religion of art and beauty which he manifested in that achievement of his adolescence, *les Cariatides*. On March 14, 1923, there was celebrated in Paris the centenary of the poet's birth, on which occasion a statue of Banville was unveiled in the Luxembourg gardens in the presence of a large assembly of literary notables; while the town of Moulins for a period of three months (March—June, 1923) paid multifarious homage to the memory of this the greatest of her native sons. That Banville's poetry was no mere bubble upon the surface of the literature of his time is to be recognized from the following two facts: in the first place, his writing was marked by such a stamp of individuality that critics had to coin words to discuss it adequately, and so, just as the peculiar flavor of the dialogue of Marivaux forced the invention of the term *marivaudage*, we have the noun *banvillerie* and especially the adjective *banvillesque* constantly cropping up in the contemporaneous criticisms of his work; in the second place, this indefinable "banvillesqueness" was the object of imitation of many of the younger Parnassians, few of whom, to be sure, succeeded in capturing it for their own poetry. The *banvillesque* quality—a label which includes both rapier-like subtlety of expression and gleaming sparkle of content as well as acrobatic dexterity and sheer pagan love of form—is to be found in varying degree in almost everything that the

poet wrote, prose as well as verse; the receipt for its distillation might best be sought in Banville's own *Petit traité de poésie française* (1872), in which he set forth in detail his views upon French versification and thus established himself as the Boileau of the Parnassians. The distance traveled by the vers-librists from the Banvillean technique may be computed from the following passage from the *Petit traité*, in which the poet lays down what he considers one of the cardinal laws of the art: "Dans la Poésie Française, la Rime est le moyen suprême d'expression et *l'imagination de la Rime* est le maître outil. Souviens-toi que, quand ta rime devient moins parfaite, c'est que ta pensée est moins haute et moins juste. Ne te dis pas hypocritement: 'J'ai sacrifié la Rime à la Pensée.' Dis-toi: 'Mon génie est voilé, obscurci, puisque je vois s'obscurcir ce qui en est le signe visible.'"⁶ This insistence upon the harmony of rhyme and meaning, upon precision of thought and expression to the rigid exclusion of all the vagueness and atmospheric suggestiveness which was to be the stock-in-trade of the Symbolists and their ilk is the *leitmotif* of the Parnassian æsthetics as voiced in the discussions of the Leconte de Lisle *salon*. How faithfully Banville himself adhered to his pet theory will emerge from a consideration of his poetry.

It was, we have seen, at the age of nineteen that Banville published *les Cariatides*, a volume of such proportions as to prove that its author had already been practicing the Muse assiduously for some time; indeed, most of the poems are dated 1841 and 1842. The volume, which takes its name from the second of its poems, though it bears all the earmarks of a maiden work, is important as showing thus early most of the characteristics which were to distinguish the mature poet. As was befitting his youth, he here takes his poetic calling most seriously; in a poem of very unusual length for Banville, "la Voie lactée," after summarizing the development of literature and stressing

⁶Paris, Charpentier, 1922, p. 261.

especially the achievements of Shakespeare, Molière, Hugo and his Romantic colleagues, he adjures "la Muse nouvelle . . . ,"

"Charmeresse au grand coeur, montre-moi le chemin."

However, in the preceding poem, "Dernière angoisse," though he felt that he ought to emulate the great figures in the history of poetry, he expressed diffidence as to his powers:

"Hélas, ma folle Muse est une enfant bohème
Qui se consolera d'avoir fait un poème
Dont le dessin va de travers,
Pourvu qu'un beau collier pare sa gorge, nue,
Et que, charmante et rose, une fille ingénue
Rie ou pleure en lisant ses vers."⁷

Here we have a sort of foreshadowing of Banville's actual career; though he frequently, and not unsuccessfully, essayed poetry of serious subject-matter, he was more at home in the sprightly or fanciful vein. This is manifest even in *les Cariatides*, where the lengthy Hugonian compositions are far less striking than the much shorter, gayer poems in imitation of the late mediæval types. For it is highly significant that, at his very *début*, Banville was already concerned with Villon, Marot, Ronsard, and du Bellay, as may be seen from the frequency with which they are mentioned, and that he employs such verse-forms as the triolet, the rondeau, the double rondeau, and the madrigal, which were later to attain to such technical perfection in his hands. His attitude towards the French poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as opposed to their successors of the classical and pseudo-classical periods is beautifully stated in one of a series of "Caprices en dizains à la manière de Clément Marot" the title of which consists of the well-known words from Boileau's *Art poétique*, "Enfin Malherbe vint":

⁷*Les Cariatides* (Paris, Lemerre, n.d., p. 50).

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

"C'était l'orgie au Parnasse, la Muse,
 Qui par raison se plaît à courir vers
 Tout ce qui brille et tout ce qui l'amuse,
 Eparpillait les rubis dans ses vers.
 Elle mettait son laurier au travers.
 Les bons rythmeurs, pris d'une frénésie,
 Comme des Dieux gaspillaient l'ambrosie;
 Tant qu'à la fin, pour mettre le holà
 Malherbe vint, et que la Poésie,
 En le voyant arriver, s'en alla."⁹

Other poems of the volume celebrate the love of life, the contempt for the *bourgeois* characteristic of Gautier and the Jeunes-France, and reveal the predilection for the subject-matter of Greek poesy and for the manner of Villon, Marot, the Pléiade, and the Romanticists which remain throughout life the unchanging elements of the Banvillean poetics. Though *les Cariatides* reflects the gropings of a young versifier not yet escaped from the larva of imitation, it is clearly prophetic of what was to come, and without it the later Banville would scarcely be comprehensible.

In the preface to his second volume of verse, *les Stalactites*, Banville calls attention to what he believes a poetic advance on his part: he has shed most of the stiltedness, of the stiff technical correctness of *les Cariatides*, and has replaced it with "une certaine mollesse . . . qui tâche à faire oublier qu'un poète, quelque poète qu'il soit, contient toujours un pédant."¹⁰ What the poet here has in mind is the abandonment of the sacerdotal heaviness of the adolescent prone to take himself too seriously, and the determination to give free rein to the joy of living and singing which were the very breath of his life. For it was as natural for Banville to carol in rhyme as it is for the mocking-bird to burst into song; the music of poetry expressed for him the music of the macrocosm. Little did it matter

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁰*Les Stalactites* (Paris, Lemerre, n.d., p. 6).

what he sang; in *les Stalactites*, which takes its name from the introductory poem, a description of stalactite caves:

"Dans les grottes sans fin brillent les Stalactites,"

the poems are all concerned with the conventional themes: love, wine, roses. But the handling begins to show greater mastery of the medium; the metrical, rhythmic, and stanzaic patterns are more varied and are marked by greater abandon. Even the staid sonnet is not respected; glance, for example, at the "Sonnet sur une dame blonde."

"Sur la colline
Quand la splendeur
Du ciel en fleur
Au soir décline,

L'air illumine
Ce front rêveur
D'une lueur
Triste et divine.

Dans un bleu ciel,
O Gabriel!
Tel tu rayonnes;

Telles encor
Sont les madones
Dans les fonds d'or."¹¹

It is especially in the use of the short verse that Banville excelled, and we find him employing it from the very outset of his career.

With the publication of *les Odelettes* in 1857, dedicated to Sainte-Beuve because of his interest in sixteenth-century French literature, Banville took his place among the master-technicians in verse; and it was upon the appearance of this same volume that the poet was definitely branded as perpetrating "de la poésie sans idées." This exacerbated criticism might, it would be supposed, have been forestalled

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 82.

by Banville's definition of the *odelette* given in the preface to his volume. "L'Odelette," we read, "c'est une phrase d'ode-épître, une manière de propos familier relevé et discipliné par les cadences lyriques d'un rythme précis et bref. C'est, si vous voulez, une goutte d'essence de rose scellée sous une étroite agate dans le chaton d'une bague."¹² In other words, as its name would imply, the *odelette* is the ode in a playful humor; it is to the ode what the crayon sketch is to the finished painting in oils. Banville justifies his use of this *genre* by showing that greater than he had employed it before him: Anacreon, Horace, and the members of the Pléiade. For sheer bedazzlement of metre and rhyme and for variety of rhyme-scheme, *les Odelettes* had hardly any equal outside the work of Banville himself. Profound poetry this certainly is not; and the reflections of Anacreon and of Ronsard, whom Banville calls "mon maître,"¹³ are so abounding as to rob the volume of any real claim to originality of content; but sparkling, laughing poetry it most certainly is, and, as such, can not be frowned out of court in scorn. Indeed, no less a chiseler of verse than Gautier paid Banville the supreme compliment of replying to the *odelette* addressed to him by the latter with "l'Art," the celebrated poem which closes *Emaux et camées*. The *Odelettes* testify to Banville's mastery of the short line, the short stanza, the short poem, which must be characterized by a sure choice of words and an unerring sense of rhyme to become effective. The type may be illustrated by the following conventionally banal poem:

"Aimons-nous et dormons
 Sans songer au reste du monde!
 Ni le flot de la mer, ni l'ouragan des monts,
 Tant que nous nous aimons
 Ne courbera ta tête blonde,
 Car l'amour est plus fort
 Que les Dieux et la Mort!

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹³In *Louanges d'Amélie*, a poem contained in the collection, *le Sang de la coupe* (1857).

Le soleil s'éteindrait
 Pour laisser ta blancheur plus pure,
 Le vent, qui jusqu'à terre incline la forêt,
 En passant n'oserait
 Jouer avec ta chevelure,
 Tant que tu cacheras
 Ta tête entre mes bras!

Et lorsque nos deux coeurs
 S'en iront aux sphères heureuses
 Où les celestes lys écloreont sous nos pleurs,
 Alors, comme deux fleurs
 Joignons nos lèvres amoureuses,
 Et tâchons d'épuiser
 La mort dans un baiser!"¹⁴

Most of the *Odelettes* are addressed, by way of title, to one or another of the poet's friends; thus, we have poems "A Sainte-Beuve," "A Henri Murger," "A Arsène Houssaye," "A Edmond et Jules de Goncourt," "A Philoxène Boyer," and two "A Théophile Gautier." The little volume puts one in mind of nothing so much as a string of glittering beads that dances, carefree, on the neck of its mistress; and the poems are, for the most part, as empty of thought as are those beads or the head above them.

In the *odelette*, Banville was merely resuscitating, according to his own avowal, a poetic *genre* that had been a favorite in earlier literary epochs. His indulgence in this lighter vein of poetry was the result of his conviction that the lyric Muse had fallen on evil days, that men were interested only in the accumulation of wealth and the enjoyment of such pleasures as can be bought with money. This feeling seems to have taken on constantly increasing force during the decade from 1846 to 1856, until the poet arrived at the conclusion that the only means of retaining the public's interest in art was the assumption of the role of Aristophanic clown. The serious "ode," à la Hugo, now patently moribund, Banville set about inventing a new type which

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.

should stand in the same relation to the ode as does caricature to genuine painting. This type he gave the name of *ode funambulesque* ("funambule" being the French word for "tight-rope-walker"), and in 1857 he published a volume of these acrobatic odes. In the *Odes funambulesques*, as he explains in the poem, "la Corde roide," Banville had exchanged the aureole of the prophet for the flour-mask of the clown in order to hold the attention of the stupid *bourgeoisie* by belaboring it vigorously. "La Corde roide" concludes with these lines:¹⁵

"O Muse! qu'il chasse aux vautours,
Ou qu'il daigne faire des tours
Sur la corde funambulesque,
Tribun, prophète ou baladin,
Toujours fuyant avec dédain
Ces pavés que le passant foule,
Et marche sur les fiers sommets
Ou sur la corde ignoble, mais
Au-dessus des fronts de la foule."

And, from the height of his tight-rope, Banville, in a series of poems that are little short of astounding for audacity of rhyme and metre, proceeds to thwack, in no uncertain manner, the smug *bourgeoisie* with its even more smug leaders, statesmen, journalists, and literary favorites. The targets of the *Odes funambulesques* are, for the most part, individuals whose names would have long since completely disappeared but for these poems, which are, therefore, almost incomprehensible without a commentary; for subject-matter, thus, the volume is practically worthless. And yet, *les Odes funambulesques* has not only survived, but it has survived as one of the important phenomena in nineteenth-century French poetry, as perhaps the supreme illustration of what can be done with mere words. It is a poetic *tour de force*, a feat of technical legerdemain that has few peers. There is a profusion of rhyme-schemes that dazzles eye as well as ear; besides the forms regularly practiced at

¹⁵*Les Odes funambulesques* (Paris, Lemerre, n.d., p. 24).

the time, such sixteenth-century types as the ballade, the chant royal, the triolet, and the virelai are deliciously rejuvenated. Especially in the triolet has Banville attained the extreme limits of the *funambulesque*; read, for instance, the one on the actor Tassin:

"Le beau Tassin, en matassin,
Parfois a fait rêver Labiche.
On n'habille pas sans dessein
Le beau Tassin en matassin.
On eût pris pour un faon, Tassin
Quand il figurait dans *la Biche*.
Le beau Tassin, en matassin,
Parfois a fait rêver Labiche."¹⁶

The tone of the volume is set by such lines as the refrain of the "Ballade de la vraie sagesse": "Vide ton verre et baise ta maîtresse,"¹⁷ or by the quatrain which forms the refrain of "la Sainte Bohème":

"Avec nous l'on chante et l'on aime
Nous sommes frères des oiseaux.
Croissez, grands lys, chantez, ruisseaux,
Et vive la Sainte Bohème!"¹⁸

And when, in the volume, the poet waxes serious, it is to heap scorn upon "le front serein de la Bêtise humaine,"¹⁹ or to attack those who would banish from life the electric thrill of "la joie de vivre."

One of Banville's chief services to French lyric poetry, it has already been indicated, was his revivification of the highly artistic verse-forms which had been so skillfully practiced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and then had been allowed to lapse into complete oblivion. Several of Banville's collections of verse are devoted, in their entirety, to one or another of the older forms. Thus, the *Améthystes*

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁹Refrain of the chant royal, "Monsieur Coquardeau," *ibid.*, p. 263.

(1861) is a series of "nouvelles odelettes amoureuses composées sur des rythmes de Ronsard"; the *Trente-six ballades joyeuses pour passer le temps* (1873) are "composées à la manière de François Villon, excellent poète qui a vécu sous le règne du roi Louis le Onzième"²⁰ (incidentally, this volume is dedicated to the memory of Albert Glatigny, who, it will soon be seen, was Banville's outstanding disciple); and the *Rondels* (1875) are "composés à la manière de Charles d'Orléans, poète et prince français, père de Louis XII, oncle de François I^{er}." Banville's activities along these lines attracted attention both at home and abroad; in England, Austin Dobson followed in his footsteps and appropriated for the national poetry of his country the verse-forms of Renaissance France. It would not be too much to say that, in the hands of Banville, French lyric poetry underwent a thorough renewal, which restored much of the graceful charm that it had lacked for two and a half centuries. Though he added little to the sum total of ideas, he not inconsiderably enriched the prosody of his people. For it can not be too often repeated that Banville was a poet as the nightingale is a songbird, innately and almost unconsciously. Indeed, as Lemaître has pointed out,²¹ Banville's strongest claim to the approbation of posterity lies in the fact that he applied the theory of "art for art's sake" more strictly than did any other poet, not excluding even the originator of the theory, Théophile Gautier, whom he always held in high reverence.

Thus far, Banville has appeared to us principally in the guise of apostle of a sort of pagan pantheism, Anacreontic rather than Platonic. Between the years 1857 and 1867, however, though he knew the joys of unquestioned success, he suffered the bitterness concomitant upon the loss of cherished friends and illusions, and in the latter year he published what is perhaps, after *les Odes funambulesques*,

²⁰For the relation of these "ballades" of Banville to those of Villon, vide the present writer's article on this subject in *Modern Language Notes*, June, 1922.

²¹*Les Contemporains*, 1st series, p. 27.

his most important contribution to French lyric poetry, *les Exilés*. Here, for the most part, the poet is in an elegiac mood; he is bewailing the "exiled," the Greek gods who have been banished from modern life and the spirit of joyous beauty which they personified. This note is especially sounded in "l'Exil des Dieux,"²² and "le Festin des Dieux";²³ in this latter poem, the gods berate man for having forced them into exile:

"Donc, chassés par ta haine et pour que tu nous pleures
 Dans ton cœur, nous avons fui nos belles demeures
 Pour l'exil; nous avons, loin de nos clairs palais,
 Subi l'affreuse mort, puisque tu le voulais!"

The tone throughout is sad, if not even bitter, although it is brightened at the end of the volume by poems written after 1863, the year in which Banville met Mme. Rochegrosse, whom he was soon to marry and who was to prove "Epouse et soeur, qui toujours, aimante et ravie, me guériras";²⁴ as a matter of fact, the poet dedicated *les Exilés* "à sa chère femme." This collection of verse is a speaking refutation of the charge that Banville is a mere "clown in poetry"; if he thought about nothing else, he was certainly gravely perturbed over the disappearance of art from the concerns of men and he fought, virtually until he drew his dying breath, the battle of the truth that is beauty. Let us listen to the poet himself on this subject; in "A la Muse," he depicts his loyalty to poetry:

"Je n'ai pas renié la Lyre. Je puis boire
 Encor dans la fontaine à la profondeur noire
 Où le rythme soupire avec les flots divins.
 O Déesse, j'étais un enfant quand tu vins
 Pour la première fois baiser ma chevelure.
 J'étais comme un avril en fleur. Nulle souillure
 Ne tachait la fierté de mon cœur ingénu.
 Plus de vingt ans se sont passés. Mon front est nu.
 Nous nous en souvenons! en ce temps-là, Déesse,

²²*Les Exilés* (Paris, Lemerre, 1867, pp. 9-10).

²³*Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

Vingt autres, comme moi, beaux, forts de leur jeunesse,
Musiciens aux fronts pensifs que décoraient
Aussi de longs cheveux d'or éclatant, juraient
De t'adorer, jaloux, jusqu'à leur dernière heure,
Et de rester toujours dans la haute demeure
Que tes yeux azurés emplissent de clarté.
Les autres sont partis, Muse. Je suis resté."²⁵

This was written on September 19, 1865; Banville was to continue to remain faithful to his Muse until his death a quarter of a century later. During this period, he published nine additional volumes of verse; and in 1892 a posthumous volume, *Dans la fournaise*, was brought out. None of these are marked by the technical wizardry of *les Odes funambulesques* or the lofty seriousness of *les Exilés*, though all of them contain interesting samples of Banville's craftsmanship. The most striking work of the later Banville is, perhaps, to be found in *les Occidentales* (1869), which is a return to the "funambulesque" maner, and the three previously-mentioned volumes of poems in the style of Charles d'Orléans, Villon, and Ronsard. *Les Idylles prussiennes* (1871), inspired by the Franco-Prussian War, does not rise above mediocrity, and the final three volumes show us a Banville on the verge of senility.

From this discussion of the life and work of Banville, it would seem to result that, whatever and however flagrant his shortcomings might be, he deserved well of France for having held high the banner of poesy in an age when poesy had begun its disappearance from a prosaic world of machinery, novels, and science. Add to this the fact that his door was always open to welcome the struggling poet who would rather starve than compromise his ideals, and that he was indubitably supreme in at least the "funambulesque" *genre* he had invented, and it is not difficult to understand the fascination which he exercised over the younger Parnassians, a fascination exceeded only slightly by that of Leconte de Lisle. Banville was the very incarnation of the music of verse; with the lover of musical French poetry he

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 203.

will always be a favorite. Let no one look for a Goethean or a Shelleian profundity in the work of Banville; he will most assuredly not find it there. But he who believes, with the hero of Banville's *Gringoire*, that poetry is a "délassement d'oisif qui consiste à arranger entre eux des mots qui occupent les oreilles comme une musique obstinée ou, tant bien que mal, peignent au vif toutes choses, et parmi lesquels s'accouplent de temps en temps des sons jumeaux, dont l'accord semble tintinnabuler follement, comme clochettes d'or,"²⁶ will surely find joy in the *Odes funambulesques* and food for thought in the *Exilés* of the beauty-loving Moulinois.

ALBERT GLATIGNY

Leconte de Lisle left a numerous poetic progeny, which included some of his leading contemporaries and successors; Banville, on the other hand, though he was the idol of the younger poets, was not so happy in his offsprings. Many were those who strove to catch the elusive "banvillesqueness" of the master's touch, but few succeeded. Anatole France, for example, apparently wavered between the philosophical reserve of Leconte de Lisle and the buoyant paganism of Banville, with a preference for the staid technique of the former, but before long he had abandoned poetry altogether. The difference between the two great Parnassians is surprisingly borne out by their principal disciples; on the one hand, we have the aristocratic dandy, the "très-snob" Heredia, hammering bronze and chiseling marble into sonnets that are perfect specimens of the type; on the other, as the standard-bearer of Banville, there is a runaway comedian, tramping over Europe in the company of roving troupes, and dashing off verses as the red-bird emits its call. It is to this bohemian *cabotin*, Albert Glatigny, one of the most amazing phenomena of the entire

²⁶See the present writer's edition of this play (New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1921, p. 74).

Parnassian era, that we shall now turn our attention for a brief spell.

"Celui qui fut notre cher aîné," writes Catulle Mendès, "le cher Albert Glatigny, esprit d'enfant ébloui de tout, cœur d'enfant épris de tout, meilleur que les meilleurs, qui nous aimait tant et que nous aimions tant, a laissé, avec une œuvre, une légende; une œuvre de joie et de bonté, d'aventure heureuse et de chimère, une légende, sœur de son œuvre, aussi joyeuse, plus douloureuse, hélas! où le désastre seul ne fut pas chimérique. Laquelle des deux survivra dans la mémoire des hommes?"¹ These words were written in 1903, forty years after the death of Glatigny; in the meantime, Mendès had done his utmost to assure the survival of the legend which had enwrapped the actor-poet from his very first appearance in Paris. Mendès' entire attitude, in later years, towards the Parnassians, was that of legend-monger. Of the four *conférences* comprising his *Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, the first is very largely devoted to Glatigny, who is pictured as a vagabond scapegrace clad in sheets of paper, emaciated as a ghost, and self-sacrificing almost to the point of self-extinction. This legend Mendès crystallized into a rhapsodic eulogy which was published as one of a group of poems, "Pour quatre poètes"² (the first was Banville, the fourth Glatigny). The poem "Pour Albert Glatigny" merits quotation in full:

"O vagabond, frère des Dieux,
Qui pour l'amour de la Chimère
Grimpas vingt ans la côte amère,
Les pieds saignants, l'œil radieux;

Toi qui, sous les ténébreux voiles
D'où l'astre épanche ses rayons,
Aimais les trous de tes haillons
Ouverts au baiser des étoiles,

Toi qui rêvas, toi qui chantas,
En l'étroite nuit, les dorées
Amplitudes des Empryées
Et l'Olympe, en des galetas,

¹*Rapport sur le mouvement poétique française*, p. 121.

²Included in the *Poésies nouvelles*, pp. 43-60.

Pour la Muse, surnaturelle
 Extase de nos coeurs épris,
 Certes, pauvre âme, tu souffris
 Mais que tu fus heureux par elle!"

Finally, in 1906, Mendès capped the climax of his legendizing activity in the name of the poet by the composition of his *Glatigny: Drame funambulesque en vers mêlé de chansons et de danses*, a fantastic commingling of fact and imagination which was presented at the Odéon in Paris,³ and proved the strongest factor in assuring the longevity of the Glatigny-legend.

The facts of Glatigny's life were, to be sure, romantic enough, and readily lent themselves to the creation of legends. Born in the Norman town of Lillebonne in 1839, the son of a carpenter who later became a gendarme, Glatigny fled from the printer's shop where he was serving an apprenticeship to become, at the age of but seventeen, *souffleur* to a troupe of strolling actors. This was the beginning of a "roman comique" which was to last almost to the end of his life and was to carry him all over France, Belgium, Italy, and even into Corsica.⁴ These nomadic years were full of material hardships, which were lightened only by the numerous loves in which the poet indulged and by the literary friendships which resulted in his publishing three slender volumes of verse, *les Vignes folles* (1857), *les Flèches d'or* (1864), and *Gilles et pasquins* (1872). In the course of his wanderings, Glatigny met at Nice, in 1868, an American girl named Emma Dennie, whom he married three years later, despite the fact that he was already in

³March 17, 1906. The play was brought out in book-form by Charpentier and Fasquelle in the same year.

⁴For the life of Glatigny, vide Job-Lazare: *Albert Glatigny, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, Bécus, 1878). Job-Lazare, whose real name was E. Kuhn, was a friend of the poet, and his biography, though shoddy in structure and marred by occasional factual errors, is, in the main, reliable. Anatole France has written a sympathetic biographical and critical "notice" as introduction to the one-volume edition of Glatigny's *Poésies complètes* (Paris, Lemerre, 1879). See also France's *la Vie littéraire*, vol. IV, pp. 307-17 (Paris, Lévy, 1900).

the advanced stages of consumption, and who stood by him devotedly and uncomplainingly until his death in 1873. A Keats with only a spark of the Keatsian genius, an incredibly poor actor whose sole skill lay in the realm of improvisation, which he practiced before delighted audiences at the Alcazar and other *café-chantants* of Paris and the provinces, Glatigny was so representative of the Parnassian spirit that his name became a byword among the poets of his day.

Glatigny was anything but a great poet; and, whatever of greatness he possessed came out under the inspiration of Banville.⁵ The marvel is that this practically illiterate youth, born and reared in the intellectual desert of a Norman village, should ever have heard the call of the Muses. It seems, from a story told by Glatigny to Heredia who passed it on to Anatole France, that, even before the visit of the strolling players who completely won his heart, he had come fortuitously upon a volume of Ronsard in the attic of his father's house, and that the odes of the great sixteenth-century poet had proved the live coal which had given speech to his hitherto mute tongue. Shortly afterwards, while in Alençon with the theatrical troupe with which he had run off, he chanced upon a copy of Banville's *Odes funambulesques* still warm from the presses. The springs of song released by Ronsard were given direction and depth by Banville, and henceforth poems flowed spontaneously and seemingly without effort from Glatigny's pen. The drudgery of the Bohemian actor's life was, from now on, endured merely for the scanty pence it might earn to enable the poet to pour forth his heart in verse. In Alençon, Glatigny made the acquaintance of the writer, Charles Asselineau, and the publisher, Poulet-Malassis, to whom he showed his first verses and who advised him to try fortune in Paris. In the capital he had himself presented to Banville and others, from all of whom he re-

⁵For a study of the indebtedness of Glatigny to Banville, vide the present writer's article on the subject in *Modern Language Notes*, March, 1926.

ceived encouragement and with whose assistance he published his first volume. When Catulle Mendès came up to Paris in 1859 and founded *la Revue fantaisiste*, Glatigny brought him a copy of *les Vignes folles*, and at once became a *habitué* of the *bureau* of the new review. Through Banville and Mendès, he obtained the entry into the Parnassian *salons*, where he seems to have commanded the respect, if not even the admiration, of his colleagues. His numerous enforced absences from Paris, however, prevented his earning any sort of permanent position in the seats of the literary mighty in the capital, and, without the affectionate interest of Banville and Mendès, he probably would soon have completely dropped from sight.

But Glatigny owed more than his mere introduction into the Parnassian inner circle to Theodore de Banville. For the *souffleur* of strolling troupes, the improviser of *café-chantants*, was in reality the most brilliant of Banville's disciples. The *Vignes folles* was dedicated to "mon cher et bien-aimé maître, Théodore de Banville," and the *Gilles et pasquins* are patterned directly upon the *Odes funambulesques*. The influence of Banville is ubiquitous in the poetry of Glatigny. In a poem entitled "le Château romantique," dedicated to Banville, he exclaims:

"Entré, cette saison dernière,
Dans le grand château, j'ai suivi
Fidèlement votre bannière,
Cher maître, et je vous ai servi."⁶

And he goes on to declare: "Votre vie a guidé ma vie, Partout où vous alliez, j'allais." An amusing proof of his "Banvillolatry" is to be found in an incident related by Job-Lazare, according to which the actor-poet engaged in a duel with a busybody Paris journalist named Albert Wolff because the latter had made some slurring remarks about Banville. The master himself has an interesting statement on the subject of the accident which revealed to Glatigny his poetic vocation. In a passage from an *Anthologie des*

⁶*Les Flèches d'or (Poésies complètes, p. 212).*

poètes français du XIX^e siècle published by Lemerre, he says: "Cependant, comme les hasards arrivent toujours, les pérégrinations du comédien errant l'amènèrent à Alençon où Malassis, l'éditeur artiste qui à ce moment-là n'habitait pas encore Paris, lui donna un recueil de vers quelconque d'un poète contemporain. Chose inouïe et vraiment prodigieuse! après avoir dévoré, relu ce livre, par lequel il avait eu la révélation du vrai langage qu'il était destiné à parler, Glatigny fut du coup, immédiatement et tout de suite, l'admirable rimeur, l'étonnant forger de rythmes, l'ouvrier excellent victorieux de toutes les difficultés, l'ingénieux et subtil artiste . . ." Throughout Mendès' *Drame funambulesque*, the spirit of Banville hovers just above the stage, and one of the personages thinks to insult Glatigny by caling him "Banville" and by continuing: "Oui, jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui, As-tu fait un seul vers qui ne soit pas de lui?"⁸ Glatigny himself makes a straightforward admission of his discipleship to Banville in the following strophe:

"O mes vers! on dira que j'imité Banville;
On aura bien raison si l'on ajoute encor
Que je l'ai copié d'une façon servile,
Que j'ai perdu l'haleine à souffler dans son cor."⁹

The paradoxical irony which constantly dogged the steps of the luckless Glatigny is nowhere more clearly revealed than in his connection with *le Parnasse contemporain*. Mendès, we have seen, claimed to have recognized his genius at once and to have received him with open arms into the ranks of the *Fantaisistes*; for him Glatigny was "le premier des Parnassiens." The dubiousness of Mendès' statement that the group was earlier known as *les Impassibles* because of Glatigny's poem, "l'Impassible," has been discussed elsewhere in this study; suffice it to say that the amiable Catulle

⁷Quoted by Mendès in the *Dictionnaire bibliographique et critique* which serves as appendix to the *Rapport*, p. 113.

⁸Spoken by Jean Morvieux in Act III, p. 138.

⁹*Gilles et pasquins*: "Epilogue" (*Poésies complètes*, p. 351).

goes so far in his excessive enthusiasm as to date the origin of the *Parnasse* from his first meeting in Paris with Glatigny. Now it is an amazing fact, in view of all this hyperbolic praise, that when Mendès and Ricard undertook to edit *le Parnasse contemporain*, they did not publish a single verse from the pen of Glatigny. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Job-Lazare nowhere mentions Mendès or *la Revue fantaisiste* and that he takes only passing notice of *le Parnasse contemporain* in connection with Glatigny's "Ballade des enfants sans souci," which appeared in the second *Recueil*, and that, furthermore, Anatole France, himself a Parnassian, makes no reference in his biographical "notice" to Glatigny's supposed friendship with Mendès or to his contributions to the "journaux parnassiens" edited by that worthy. Most striking of all, however, is the fact that Glatigny is represented in only the second of the three *Recueils*, in the editing of which Mendès' functions had been taken over by Banville, and there by a group of but four comparatively short poems.¹⁰ It would seem, therefore, that Mendès, arrived at the age of reminiscence, had let his memory and his imagination run riot, and had highly colored a relationship with a picturesque personage who had impressed those with whom he had come into contact by the distinctiveness of his individuality rather than by the flame of his genius. The real link between Glatigny and such of his benefactors as Banville and Mendès was not his actually published verse, but the complete independence of nature and the thoroughgoing devotion to art and love of beauty that animated all his strivings. In these respects, at least, Glatigny was the typical Parnassian and merited the attention of his generation.

¹⁰Ballade des enfants sans souci," not included in any of Glatigny's three published collections of verse; "A un poète" (printed in *Gilles et pasquins* under the title of "A Sully Prudhomme"); "A Cosette" (the poet's dog, who was his companion on many of his wanderings and shared many of his tribulations); and "A Alexandre de Bernay" (these last two are also to be found in *Gilles et pasquins*).

Glatigny's three volumes of verse need not detain us for long. The first, *les Vignes folles*, shows throughout the influence of Banville and of the "doux Ronsard"; the Ronsardian admonition: "Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie," might well have served as the legend for many of these poems of his youth. Throughout is evident a pulsing love of life and of those things which make life beautiful; per contra, the banality of the *bourgeois* existence is denigrated at every possible opportunity. "La vertu," we read:

"La vertu n'est souvent qu'un songe,
Bien plus bref que les nuits d'été,
Marie, et tout songe est mensonge,
Votre gorge est la vérité."¹¹

Technically, the poems are interesting for the ease and finish of their composition and for the variety of metrical schemes which they offer. The concluding poem of the volume, "les Antres malsains," a luridly disgusted description of the interiors of bawdy-houses and of their inmates, is noteworthy, by way of contrast, as evidence of the fact that the poet may have felt the influence of Baudelaire. The second collection of poems, *les Flèches d'or*, which was dedicated to Leconte de Lisle, shows us a maturer Glatigny, still harping, to be sure, upon the eternal Anacreontic themes, but sounding more and more shrilly the note of *taedium vitae*. In the wake of Banville, Glatigny called upon his comrades to hold high the "drapeau de mil huit cent trente,"¹² for:

"Nous sommes vus par le Maître de gloire
Qui du fond de l'exil domine notre histoire
Et protège nos fronts de son laurier vainqueur."¹³

Finally, in *Gilles et pasquins*, Glatigny appropriates the "ode funambulesque" to his own uses, and drapes a series of barbed shafts aimed at the literary and political "stand-patters" of the day in cleverly worded and rhymed compositions. Celebrating in such poems as "Parades de la foire," "Halte de comédiens," and "Roman comique," the

¹¹No. 7 of *les Vignes folles*.

¹²From "le Château romantique," cited above.

¹³"A Théophile Gautier," no. 1 of *les Flèches d'or*.

joys of the life of the strolling actor, Glatigny insists to the last upon the superiority of this independent existence over that of the colorless *bourgeois*.

"Pour moi, dont la peau tannée et roussie
Par tous les soleils ne redoute rien,
Je suis ma chimère et ma fantaisie,
Poète lyrique et comédien!

Et quand j'atteindrai le bout de la voie,
Enivré d'espace et plein d'univers,
Je mourrai le cœur débordant de joie,
Murmurant encor une fin de vers."¹⁴

In these two brief strophes, Glatigny has compressed the very essence of Banvillean Parnassianism. A quarter of a century later, Edmond Rostand was to give flesh and blood to these sentiments of individual liberty and love of life and beauty in the person of the immortal Cyrano de Bergerac.

Glatigny, it has been said, was Théodore de Banville's outstanding disciple; he might almost have been called his only disciple. Others followed in his footsteps: Philoxène Boyer, for instance, who collaborated with Banville on several of his plays and who wrote poems for all occasions, many of which died in manuscript;¹⁵ or Gabriel Marc, the author of the triolet-series, "l'Entresol du Parnasse," previously quoted. It was Glatigny, however, who most thoroughly assimilated the precepts and the practice of Banville, and who was possessed of sufficient talent to enable him to create poetry of something more than mediocre calibre. In his absolute disdain for the materialities of life, in his firm belief in the divinity of the poetic vocation, Glatigny was a refreshing "sport" who had fortuitously been thrust into the world of machinery, and who, taking few monetary rewards out of that world, left it richer by the spontaneity of his song and passed into the next his head high and his throat wide open in a trilling warble of undefiled independence.

¹⁴"Cartes de viste," no. 42 of *Gilles et pasquins*.

¹⁵Boyer's *les Deux saisons* contains a poem to Banville, inspired by his play, *Gringoire*, in which the master is praised for having given "dans la même fête, Scott, Aristophane, et Villon!" (p. 203).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE AND HIS DISCIPLES

Parnassianism, it has by now been amply demonstrated, was the phoenix which arose from the ashes of the Romanticism of 1830, when the exaggeratedly mawkish narcissism of Lamartine and Musset suffered at least temporary eclipse before the imposing individuality of Hugo, the embittered impersonality of Vigny, and the technical brilliance of Gautier. Of the great progenitors of the Parnassian group, Leconte de Lisle had chosen to follow the path marked out by Hugo and Vigny, Banville had accepted the artistic gage flung down by Gautier. There was, however, a third poet whom many of the younger Parnassians were to revere as their master, and who, while possessing Gautier's prosodic wizardry and capable of the philosophical intensity of Hugo and Vigny, commands attention as representing the reverse side of the Parnassian medal. For properly to understand Charles Baudelaire, the remaining member of the triumvirate who, after Hugo, dominated French lyric poetry of the middle of the nineteenth century, one must juxtapose to his work that of Lamartine and Musset, and, to appreciate his attitude towards life, one must realize the *Weltanschauung* of the vast majority of Frenchmen of the time. It has become a commonplace to apply to Baudelaire the epithet "satanic"; and it is certainly true that he shows a strong resemblance to Goethe's Mephistopheles, "der Geist der stets verneint." Baudelaire's genius was essentially negating, even to the extremest point of perversity; his entire life was one long prosopopea of the Flaubertian maxim: "Epatez le bourgeois." Weary of the eternal moonings of the imitators of Lamartine and Musset, the promenades in moonlit forests, by plashing fountains, with pale, golden-haired maidens whose hard-heartedness or fickleness or

untimely demise, as the case might be, rendered true love unattainable, Baudelaire set out to lead a life that would be totally different from that of his average fellow-man and to describe that life in poetry which would shock his readers into a realization of some of the unseemlier aspects of existence. The result was a body of verse which for sheer demoniac power was something entirely new in its day and will almost certainly endure as a monument not only to Baudelaire's technical mastery, but principally to the searing cruelty of his vision. *Les Fleurs du mal* is one of those rare volumes which, in common with the work of Villon, Rabelais, Molière, and Hugo, contributed towards widening the scope of French literature, and it foreshadowed the achievements of the naturalistic and psychopathic novelists, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the generation of poets which was to break completely with Parnassianism and to usher in a new era of French lyric poetry.

The life of Charles Baudelaire is an excellent illustration of the contempt in which the emotionally and intellectually shallow routine of the *bourgeois* was held by the generation of Gautier, Flaubert, and their fellows. Born in Paris in 1821, of a father who was then sixty-two years old and a mother twenty-eight (much of the so-called degeneracy in his make-up has been blamed upon this disparity in the age of his parents), Baudelaire experienced little of the joys of youth. His father, who had known the friendship of Condorcet and others of the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and would probably have appreciated the future poet's artistic penchant, died when the boy was but seven, and in the very next year, his mother re-married, this time a commandant Aupick, who was later to serve his country in various diplomatic functions and would have liked nothing better than to see his stepson follow in his footsteps. M. Aupick was promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy in 1830 and ordered to Lyons, whither he removed his family and where Charles'

education was begun. From the first, the boy showed a tendency towards aloofness from his environment, a characteristic which was strengthened during his years at the Collège Louis-le-Grand (the Aupicks having returned to Paris), where he met Louis Ménard, who was to remain a life-long friend, and where he first tried his hand at versification. Having obtained his baccalaureate and the time for the choice of a career at hand, Baudelaire stunned his mother and the dignified step-father by announcing his intention of becoming a man-of-letters. He had received upon the death of his father a legacy which assured him his independence, and though he was unable to touch this money during his minority, he was comparatively free to do as he pleased. For the next three years, then, he frequented the literary groups of the Latin Quarter, where he made the acquaintance of such literary lights as Balzac, Gérard de Nerval, and Théodore de Banville. With the establishment of Leconte de Lisle in Paris in 1846, Baudelaire was presented to the Bourbonian by Ménard, and the two poets, carried away by the humanitarian ideals of the day, experienced the thrills of 1848 together, knew the dejection caused by the failure of the Revolution, and determined after the *coup d'état* of 1851 never to be side-tracked henceforth from the path of pure literature.

Shortly before Baudelaire attained his majority, that is to say in 1841, M. and Mme. Aupick, gravely concerned over the life of idleness which he was leading, and perhaps even more by his moral and spiritual laxity, concluded that a change of atmosphere would prove beneficial and decided to send him on a trip to the East Indies, where he was to engage in a business venture. From a letter addressed to M. Aupick by the captain of the vessel upon which Baudelaire had embarked, we learn that the future poet had made his distaste for the purpose of the voyage so evident to both crew and passengers that it had seemed wisest to end his discomfort as soon as possible, so that he had been

permitted to land on the île de Bourbon,¹ where he spent several months imbibing the beauties of the tropical island, basking in the languors of the equatorial climate and not improbably schooling himself in the passions of dark-skinned paramours. It is an interesting coincidence that Baudelaire should have sojourned in the native island of Leconte de Lisle (at this time in Brittany) and of Léon Dierx (then a child of three) and it is certain that Bourbon was a welcome topic of conversation for the three poets at the *salon* in the Boulevard des Invalides. Be that as it may, Baudelaire returned to Paris more than ever determined to live his own life, in the face of the opposition of parents totally unable to understand his ambitions and predilections, and the attainment of his majority a few months later endowed him with the freedom which was so essential for the achievement of his goal.

Once in legal possession of his patrimony, Baudelaire made haste to sever his connections with the Aupicks and to set up an establishment of his own in an old but aristocratic *hôtel* on the île Saint-Louis. Here he gave free rein to a trait in his character which had been present since early youth—the penchant towards a Bohemian, and at the same time dandyish, dillettantism. Baudelaire's supreme ideal was to become the perfect dandy—not alone in matters of dress and deportment, but especially in æsthetic tastes. The dandy, according to his own description, “doit aspirer à être sublime. Il doit vivre et dormir devant un miroir.”² The true artist must be a dilettante, who creates for his own pleasure and not for acquisitive ends. Furthermore, the dandy must not only be more careful in self-apparel than the ordinary man, his general mode of life and his way of thinking must be marked by absolute independence; ergo, the Bohemian alone lives beautifully. For the remaining quarter-century of Baudelaire's life, in despite of debts

¹Vide Séché et Bertaut: *Charles Baudelaire* (Paris, Louis-Michaud, n.d., p. 29 et seq.). Most of the facts of the poet's life have been gleaned from this work.

²Quoted by Séché et Bertaut, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

that soon came to reduce his wealth to poverty and an ugly illness which brought him to a premature end, the poet clung tenaciously to these principles. His chiefest delight seemed to consist in shocking the "man of the streets," and he conducted his life with this end in view. For close to twenty years he supported a mulatto mistress, one Jeanne Duval whom he called "la Vénus noire," an incompetent actress of a basely sensual nature with whom he had nothing intellectual in common. This degrading union notwithstanding, he maintained a constant interest in the literature and art of his day, was known, at least during the first years of his independence, for the fastidiousness of his appearance, and was on terms of friendship with most of the important creative artists of the time. His apartment in the hôtel Pimodan was tastefully, if not even sumptuously, appointed, and it was not long before he was spending more than his income and eating into his capital. Moreover, in the company of a group which called itself the "Club des Haschischins" and met regularly in the apartment of the artist Fernand Boissard, also in the hôtel Pimodan, Baudelaire surrendered himself to the fascination of hasheesh-eating and to the use of drugs; Gautier confesses to having sought the artificial bliss described in some detail by Baudelaire in his *Paradis artificiels* in the company of this group,³ and even Balzac was prevailed upon once to try the stimulant, but he found it highly repugnant and never repeated the experiment. Extravagant stories as to Baudelaire's expenditures and carnal follies were rife, and a veritable mountain of anecdotes and legends was accumulated. Although most of these tales were apocryphal, it is not to be denied that Baudelaire was weakened, both physically and mentally, by his excesses, and it soon became evident that, unless he took hold of himself and undertook some serious occupation, he would be threatened with a wretched and untimely end.

³Vide Théophile Gautier's highly interesting preface to the Calmann-Lévy edition of *les Fleurs du mal*, p. 57 et seq.

Baudelaire now set about, therefore, with some degree of earnestness, to capitalize his literary gifts. The high-road to success, for would-be *littérateurs*, then as now, it was the accepted belief, was journalism; and so Baudelaire began the Sisyphean toil of grinding out matter for the maw of the *feuilleton*. His first published effort of any value was his *Salon* of 1845, a decidedly keen piece of art-criticism which was so well received that its author was encouraged to repeat the performance the following year, and comparisons with the celebrated *Salons* of Diderot were not infrequent. Of rather amusing interest is Baudelaire's introduction to his *Salon de 1846*, which was dedicated "Aux Bourgeois," whom he extolled in the following terms: "Vous êtes la majorité,—nombre et intelligence;—donc vous êtes la force,—qui est la justice." After exhorting the *bourgeoisie* to display its good sense by patronizing the arts, he concluded: "C'est donc à vous, bourgeois, que ce livre est naturellement dédié; car tout livre qui ne s'adresse pas à la majorité,—nombre et intelligence,—est un sot livre."⁴ In view of Baudelaire's later ceaselessly-voiced horror of everything smacking even remotely of the *bourgeois*, this introduction is, to say the least, somewhat risible. But the poet, like his friend Leconte de Lisle, was at this time passing through a humanitarian, utilitarian crisis which was to be terminated only by the disillusionment of 1848. Baudelaire's ventures into the realm of criticism, however, did not cease with the downfall of the July monarchy; he contributed to various reviews studies on the Fine Arts section of the World's Fair of 1855 and on the *Salon* of 1859, as well as essays on French and English caricaturists; all of these are now to be found in the volume of his *Œuvres complètes* which bears the caption of *Curiosités esthétiques*. Among the periodicals to which Baudelaire contributed during the years 1846 to 1850 were *l'Artiste*, then under the direction of Arsène Houssaye and later to count Gautier among its editors, *l'Esprit public*, *l'Echo*

⁴*Salon de 1846* (in *Curiosités esthétiques*, vol. IV of Baudelaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, n.d., pp. 77-80).

des théâtres, and *le Tintamarre*; indeed, he even went so far as to undertake, in collaboration with the novelist Champfleury, the foundation of a journal of his own, which was called *le Salut public*, and which died virtually at birth, only two numbers finding their way into the world. Besides his essays in art-criticism, Baudelaire also contributed poems and literary studies to the journals, and it is in *feuilleton* form that his justly-famed translations of Edgar Allan Poe, with whose life and philosophy he had so much in common, first made their appearance. But Baudelaire was too intractable, too intransigent to be a successful journalist, and after 1859 he definitely abandoned the bastard art-form of journalism for pure literature. And so, writing to a friend in 1862, he could with no small show of justice say of himself: "Comment n'avez-vous pas deviné que Baudelaire, ça voulait dire: Auguste Barbier, Théophile Gautier, Banville, Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle, c'est-à-dire, littérature pure?"⁵

Though his complete works number some seven volumes of verse, criticisms, and translations, Baudelaire, like Heredia after him, was really a poet "*unius libri*." But this one book, *les Fleurs du mal*, published by Poulet-Malassis in 1857, shared with such works as *les Méditations poétiques*, *Hernani*, and *Madame Bovary* the distinction of ranking among the unquestionably outstanding productions of nineteenth century French letters. The volume of verse fell like a bombshell into the laps of readers and reviewers and the explosion shook the whole of literary France. Like Flaubert, Baudelaire and his publishers were accused by the State of having produced an "immoral" work; but, whereas *Madame Bovary* was, as a result of the sagacity of the defending attorney, cleared of the charge, *les Fleurs du mal* was not so fortunate. Much to Baudelaire's disgust, he was fined three hundred francs and his publishers two hundred, and six of the most offending

⁵In a letter to Falubert printed by Eugène Crépet in an appendix to his *Charles Baudelaire: Œuvres posthumes et correspondances inédites* (Paris, Quantin, 1887, p. 297).

poems were ordered expunged from the bouquet of "flowers of evil." The friends of the poet and all those who championed the cause of "l'art pour l'art" rallied to the defence of the condemned author; among others, Hugo wrote from his exile in Guernsey to congratulate Baudelaire upon the creation of a "beau livre" and upon the sentence inflicted by the government. Two years later he sent his fellow-poet another letter which contained the following truly complimentary lines: "Vous dotez le ciel de l'art d'on ne sait quel rayon macabre. *Vous créez un frisson nouveau.*"⁶

The notoriety attaching to the trial and conviction of Baudelaire stimulated him to a continuance of his literary activity, and the years immediately following the publication of *les Fleurs du mal* saw him busily engaged on his translation of Poe and the composition of the prose poems which were to be issued in volume form under the title of *Petits poèmes en prose*, and were to constitute his second claim to the admiration of his contemporaries and the respect of posterity. So convinced was Baudelaire of the high merit of his work that, in 1861, he announced his candidacy for the French Academy, not because he had any illusions of being elected to that hyper-dignified and conservative body, some of whose members had never even heard of him, but merely as a gesture of self-contentment or perhaps, as has been conjectured, as a protest against the Academy's failure to admit Gautier into its ranks. After having, in conformity with the etiquette of the Institut, paid the preliminary formal calls upon a few of the Academicians, by whom he was received with varying degrees of coldness, Baudelaire was prevailed upon by Sainte-Beuve to withdraw his candidacy. This episode was characteristic of the closing years of his life. As early as 1844, M. Aupick, alarmed by the prodigality with which the young dandy was squandering his patrimony, had obtained from the courts a decree placing his stepson's funds in the hands of a guardian, a Neuilly notary named M. Ancelle, who was

⁶Quoted by Séché and Bertaut, p. 101. The italics are inserted.

instructed to keep him on a rigid allowance. Constitutionally unable to set himself to any remunerative work and refusing to deny himself what he considered the essential pleasures of life, Baudelaire began to accumulate debts, which before very long became the bane of his existence. The meagre returns from his sporadic writings were spent even before they had been earned, and the poet was reduced to borrowing from any one who would lend, notably from Poulet-Malassis who, in 1861, himself met financial disaster on the reefs of bankruptcy, and to pawning all his belongings at the Mont-de-piété. In addition to these monetary difficulties, there were the annoyances resulting from the relationship with "la Vénus noire," for whom the poet had never felt any genuine affection and to whom, inexplicably enough, he remained loyal in the midst of all his torments, material and mental, and whose own infirmities, the result of her loose living, cost the poet much anxiety and most of his allowance. It is not surprising, therefore, that the thought of suicide haunted his imagination and that, in 1859, he made an unsuccessful attempt to emulate the unfortunate Gérard de Nerval, for whom he always maintained the highest regard. Matters went steadily from bad to worse, and, as a last resort, Baudelaire was advised by a friend to undertake a series of lectures in Belgium on contemporary French art and letters. It was in April, 1864, that Baudelaire left on the Belgian Odyssey which was originally intended to be of only short duration and from which he was to return to Paris two years later in the final stages of the disease that terminated his life.

Arrangements were made for a series of five lectures, at one hundred francs each, to be delivered before the *Cercle des arts* of Brussels. The first of these, on Delacroix, whom Baudelaire considered the foremost of contemporaneous French painters, was greeted with interest; the second, on Gautier, which the lecturer concluded with the words: "Je salue en Théophile Gautier, mon maître, le grand poète du siècle," was attended by so small and so unappreciative an

audience, and the remaining three lectures were so completely unnoticed that when the time came for the settlement, the *Cercle des arts* sent Baudelaire a miserly hundred francs. As there had been no written contract, Baudelaire was helpless; but he was filled with an exasperation for Belgium and the Belgians which frequently waxed vehemently obscene in tone and which vented itself upon every phase of Belgian life and manners. Failing in his efforts to arrange lectures in other cities and in his hope of finding a publisher to bring out a Belgian edition of his complete works, Baudelaire projected a work on Belgium, and with this in view, visited the principal towns and made observations on their museums, commerce, and morals. The book, however, did not pass beyond the outline stage, for the poet was now beginning to suffer the first attacks of the illness which was before very long to carry him off. Though he was becoming anxious to return to Paris and especially to pay a visit to his mother, who had retired to Honfleur after the death of M. Aupick in 1857 and with whom the poet had effected a reconciliation, Baudelaire was held prisoner in Brussels by the precarious condition of his health as well as by the debts which had continued to accumulate during his Belgian sojourn. Early in 1866, while visiting a church in the city of Namur, in the company of the artist Félicien Rops and Poulet-Malassis, Baudelaire experienced a first stroke of paralysis, which deprived him almost wholly of speech and the use of his limbs. His mother and his legal guardian, M. Ancelle, were immediately summoned to Brussels, where the unhappy Baudelaire was placed in a hospital, already far gone in disease. A few months of absolute rest sufficiently restored the poet's health to enable him to be taken back to Paris, where a room had been prepared for him in a private sanatorium. Here, despite periods of comparative comfort and lucency, Baudelaire, though surrounded by the sympathetic attentions of his numerous admirers, gradually decayed, and his death on August 31, 1867, occasioned no surprise. His funeral

was attended by artists of his own generation who had understood his aspirations—Banville, Alphonse Lemerre, the painter Edouard Manet—and by a few of the host of poets for whom *les Fleurs du mal* represented a sort of revelation and who fairly worshipped at the shrine of Baudelaire. Horrible in the extreme, the poet's death was but the logical termination to a life which had been marked by a total disregard for the most elementary notions of personal hygiene, and the *bourgeois* whom he had always so delighted to shock by his excesses and by his actual and imagined paradoxes might well nod his head in ill-concealed delight and prophetically declare that he had long since foreseen the conclusion of the tragedy. The dandy whose costumes had been copied and whose poems had been gleefully recited in the advanced literary circles of the day had, through the workings of one of those paradoxes which governed his conduct, strangely enough in the face of the complete amorality of his life, always remained a professing Catholic, though devout churchmen had little use for such an unorthodox brother. Nevertheless, the dandy who died an imbecile had had visions of real beauty, and the cacophonous notes of *les Fleurs du mal*, with their harsh clashes of "spleen" and "idéal," form an indispensable chord in the diapason of nineteenth century French lyric poetry.

The collection of verse which earned Baudelaire the doubtful distinction of a governmental fine was very aptly entitled *les Fleurs du mal*; the poems it contained were composed during the decade which preceded their publication in 1857. The first edition was prefaced by the following dedication: "Au poète impeccable, au parfait magicien ès lettres françaises, à mon très-cher et très-vénéré maître et ami, Théophile Gautier, avec les sentiments de la plus profonde humilité, je dédie ces fleurs malades." This self-abasement, however, was at least a trifle exaggerated; for Baudelaire need not have been told that he owed Gautier little more than the inspiration to sacrifice all to the exigencies of pure art and that, in subject-matter, he was throwing wide the portals to an entirely new realm. The

“blue flower” of Novalis and his colleagues of the second epoch of German Romanticism, transplanted to France by the neophytes of the Lamartinian school, had begun to droop under the irony of Musset and, in the hands of Baudelaire, shriveled into a “fleur malade” and died. In a preface to one of the numerous recent editions of *les Fleurs du mal*,⁷ the advanced modernist, Guillaume Apollinaire, the poet whose career was so prematurely terminated by the World War, assigns to Baudelaire the credit for having inaugurated a new era in French poetry, though he has little sympathy for the sickly perversity which pervaded his work. And as will be shown before long, though Baudelaire was the intimate friend of both Leconte de Lisle and Banville and was venerated by many of the younger Parnassians as their master, his influence was to prove fatal to the ambitions of the *Parnasse contemporain*. If he had lived another two or three lustra in command of his full powers, it is not at all improbable that Baudelaire himself would have renounced Parnassianism; as it was, it remained for two of his principal disciples, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, in their beginnings Parnassians of the purest water, to point the way to the new roads in French lyric poetry on whose milestones were marked the divers appellations of the Symbolist-Decadent groups.

The year 1857, it may be repeated, may fairly be said to date in the history of French lyric poetry; for it saw the publication of the first one-volume edition of Leconte de Lisle’s *Œuvres complètes*, of Banville’s *Odes funambulesques*, and of Baudelaire’s *les Fleurs du mal*. These three works were the poles about which the creative ambitions of the Parnassians gyrated, and, in many respects, each was as different from the other as is the île de Bourbon from Paris. They represent, respectively, what might be termed the philosophical, the acrobatic, and the satanic aspects of Parnassianism; in their *ensemble*, they constitute a perfect image of French lyric poetry from 1850 to 1875. But however they may have differed from one another, they have

⁷Paris, J. Chevrel, 1917.

several highly important traits in common. In the first place, despite their authors' detestation for certain phases of Romanticism, they all justly merit the epithet of neo-Romantic. Leconte de Lisle had followed Hugo back to the Middle Ages, and had then set himself to the versification of a "legend of the ages" entirely his own and actually antedating that of the "père en exil"; Banville had more than literally followed the advice of Gautier to "carve and chisel" his poems as the sculptor hews the marble; and Baudelaire, turning in scorn from the angelic maidens adored on moonlit lakes by anæmic Lamartines, had, with a hyper-Romantic distortion of the truth, celebrated the charms of street-hags and the foul-smelling delights of worm-eaten corpses. Finally, all three poets were at one with Gautier in their scorn for utilitarian and didactic verse, their firm belief that art is its own justification, and their untiring efforts to achieve the highest possible degree of technical perfection in the practice of their art.

Possessing the evocative skill and the linguistic purity of Leconte de Lisle as well as the metrical polish and the verbal audacity of Banville, Baudelaire's poetry is marked by a distinguishing trait which was to prove the keynote of the remainder of the century—a trait which critics have agreed to term "satanism." Whereas previous poets had sung of the worship of God, the love of chaste women, the beauties of nature, and the joys of living, Baudelaire invoked the devil as his patron saint, hymned perverse passions in the arms of horribly diseased prostitutes or of a kept woman who was merely an erotic machine, lauded the sophistication and the artificiality of Parisian Bohemianism, and longed for the time when he might take his place in the dance of death. To be sure, there were moments when he recoiled in remorse and loathing from the impurities of his unnatural existence, fell on his knees in supplication to "des Cieux spirituels l'inaccessible azur,"⁸ and sought for a love which should wash him clean in body and

⁸*Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1890, "l'Aube spirituelle," p. 154).

soul. These conflicting emotions were succinctly phrased by Baudelaire himself in the title of the principal group of poems in *les Fleurs du mal*, "Spleen et idéal," and they were incarnated in the persons of the two women who played a preponderant rôle in the poet's sex-life, Jeanne Duval and Mme. Sabatier, the latter of whom presided so charmingly over the salon which was for years the gathering-place of the leading men-of-letters of the day—Gautier, the Goncourts, Louis Bouilhet, and, of course, Baudelaire. The periods of repentance, however, were brief, and the love of a beautiful and talented woman not sufficiently piquant for his perverted taste. After secretly worshipping Mme. Sabatier for several years and addressing to her some of his most perfect poems, Baudelaire was crowned with the supreme gift of complete surrender; whereupon he immediately returned to the licentious arms of the "black Venus." It was only from the depths that he could cry out unto Heaven; once he had clambered out of his pit, he remained in the upper ether for a fleeting moment only to slip back helplessly, if not even willingly, into the mire. The "ideal" was the distant star which occasionally lighted up the poet's horizon; for the most part, however, he dwelt in the outer darkness of "spleen" and "ennui."

As for *les Fleurs du mal*, the volume is by now almost too well known to warrant any lengthy discussion. In phraseology that is as beautifully simple as the ideas it clothes are unusual, in verse marked by a fine feeling for music of sound, rhythm of movement, and symmetry of structure, Baudelaire poured forth his lamentations against life, his sensations in the chains of unwholesome loves, and his occasional pantings after purity and light. A reading of *les Fleurs du mal* leaves one with the distinct impression of having held converse with a powerful individuality, who dared reveal his inmost thoughts to a smugly hypocritical world, and who was endowed with the genius to drape those thoughts in a harmonious and colorful style that has rarely been excelled. True, the harmonies are Debussian rather than Chopinesque, the colors are those of a Cézanne rather

than of an Ingres; and it would be no exaggeration to maintain that Baudelaire was, in a measure, responsible for Debussy and "les Six," for Cézanne and the Futurists. In cleaving a path through the accepted conventions of art, in cutting to the very marrow of life and laying it bare in all its starkness, Baudelaire really inaugurated an epoch, the epoch which has seen such an efflorescence in the various art-forms, and which is still, from all appearances, in the developmental stage. A psycho-analyst, a Dada-ist, a "jazzist" "avant la lettre," Baudelaire was the progenitor of Jules Laforgue, of Marcel Proust, of Igor Strawinsky, of Marc Chagall. And whether or not one may admire the present-day tendencies in art, one can not afford to be blind to their existence and to the fact that they are an effort in the direction of an honest reflection of present-day life. What critics have styled Baudelaire's "satanism" was merely an insistence upon painting life as he saw it and his refusal to observe it through the rose-tinted glasses of the "realistic idealists" and the Romantic optimists. In all probability, Baudelaire, in his desire to be sincere, leaned too far in the opposite direction and exaggerated the bleakness of human existence and the putridity of the human body and soul. The fact remains, however, that his poetry bears the double stamp of courageous integrity and of originality, and that he belongs in the great line of innovators, from Rabelais and Villon, through Corneille and Racine, to Hugo and Flaubert.

The "satanism" of Baudelaire appears upon almost every page of *les Fleurs du mal*. Where it is not an integral element of the theme treated in a given poem, it will seize the opportunity of introducing itself in the form of a macabre metaphor. Thus the "ideal" takes on, for the poet, the form not of "ces beautés de vignettes" but of Lady Macbeth, "âme puissante au crime";⁹ when he makes love to his

⁹"L'Idéal," *les Fleurs du mal*, p. 112.

"bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits,"¹⁰ the "femme impure,"¹¹ he advances to the attack "comme après un cadavre un choeur de vermisseaux."¹² He is uncertain as to the provenience of Beauty. The "Hymne à la Beauté" asks:

"Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abîme,
O Beauté? Ton regard, infernal et divin,
Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime,
Et l'on peut pour cela te comparer au vin."¹³

But what matter?

"Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,
O Beauté, monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu!
Si ton œil, ton souris, ton pied, m'ouvrent la porte
D'un Infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?

De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou Sirène,
Qu'importe, si tu rends—fée aux yeux de velours,
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine:—
L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?"¹⁴

The poet's themes derive from the world of the horrible, the cruel, the demoniac, the extraordinary, the exotic. He would like to be the lover of a young giantess;¹⁵ he describes his sensations of a night with "une affreuse Juive";¹⁶ he warns his mistress that she will one day be a foul worm-eaten carrion;¹⁷ he sings of vampires, owls, his beloved cats, the moon and the moon-struck, of the Demon in all his incarnations, wine, opiates, creole women, ghosts, joyous Death, spleen, hatred, horror, Nothingness. This orgy of debauched skeletons, this long "danse macabre," falters now and then to allow the poet to be stricken with remorse,

¹⁰"Sed non satiata," *ibid.*, p. 123.

¹¹"Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle," *ibid.*, p. 122.

¹²"Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne," *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹³"Hymne à la Beauté, *ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁵"La Géante," *ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁶"Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse Juive," *ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁷"Une Charogne," *ibid.*, p. 127.

to strive towards the blinding light. "De profundis clamavi,"¹⁸ he moans in anguish; from the depths of depravity he cries out his self-disgust; in the arms of the black Venus, he longs for the cool softness of the hands of Mme. Sabatier, "la très-belle, la très-bonne, la très-chère," "l'Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone."¹⁹ He visualizes the "aube spirituelle";²⁰ he invites his adored one to travel with him to the realm where "tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté";²¹ he intones a hymn "à l'idole immortelle," for whom his "amour incorruptible" is a "Grain de musc qui gis, invisible, Au fond de mon éternité."²² But it is of no avail. Always he sinks back into the slough. The spirit of revolt is overpowering; he is of the accursed race of Cain and has only contempt for the descendants of Abel.²³ Satan remains his guardian angel.

"O toi le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges,
Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges,
O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!"
"Gloire et louange à toi, Satan, . . ."²⁴

Life is a loathsome chancre; Death is the high adventure.

"O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!
Ce pays nous ennuie, o Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte:
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!"²⁵

The significance of Baudelaire in the history of modern art has already been indicated. It may be emphasized at

¹⁸"De profundis clamavi," *ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁹"Que diras-tu ce soir, pauvre âme solitaire," *ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁰"L'Aube spirituelle," *ibid.*, p. 154.

²¹"L'Invitation au voyage," *ibid.*, p. 181.

²²"Hymne," *ibid.*, p. 341.

²³"Abel et Caïn," *ibid.*, p. 329.

²⁴"Les Litanies de Satan," *ibid.*, pp. 332-35.

²⁵"Le Voyage," p. 351.

this point, by way of conclusion, by a passing reference to the *Petits poèmes en prose*.²⁶ This work is a rather heterogeneous congeries of impressions, transcribed moods, and what today would be called sketches and brief personal essays, all written in a mellifluous, easy-flowing, though not strictly rhythmic, prose. Though Chateaubriand,²⁴ Aloysius Bertrand,²⁸ and others had, before him, written specimens of what has since come to be known as the prose-poem, to Baudelaire must be given the credit for establishing the vogue of this *genre* and of thereby foreshadowing the era of free-verse, in the present-day acceptation of the term, as employed by Rimbaud and many of his imitators of the Symbolist-Decadent groups and their successors of today, and, in this country, by Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and the legion of their fellows. The *Petits Poèmes en prose*, like *les Fleurs du mal*, ring the changes on all the passions and emotions of the highly sensitive Baudelaire—love in its manifold forms, hate, jealousy, cruelty, disgust, ironic bitterness, and tongue-in-cheek lewdness. As in *les Fleurs du mal*, the stinging aroma of the poet's personality is unescapable. It is no matter for wonder, then, that Baudelaire exercised so powerful an attraction upon the poets who came under the spell of his personal magnetism or of the witchery of his verse and that such consummate artists as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé called him master. Nor was his influence confined to his own land and his own generation; his presence can readily be detected in the work of Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, in *The Spoon River Anthology* and in *Winesburg, Ohio*, and his spirit marches on triumphantly in the productions of *avant-gardistes* the world over.

²⁶Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1890.

²⁷Cf. *Atala* (Paris, Garnier frères, n.d., pp. 38-39).

²⁸Vide his collection of prose poems: *Gaspard de la Nuit* (Paris, Mercure de France, 9th ed., 1920).

PAUL VERLAINE

Paul Verlaine, it has just been said, called Baudelaire "master." Strictly, this is not true. In a dedicatory poem, "A Charles Baudelaire," appearing at the head of the volume called *Liturgies intimes* (1892), Verlaine asseverates:

"Je ne t'ai pas connu, je ne t'ai pas aimé,"
Je ne te connais point et je t'aime encor moins";¹

and he continues to the effect that what sympathy he has for his predecessor is based upon the latter's life-long loyalty to the religion of his fathers (a loyalty which, it has been intimated, was only another form of his *dandyisme*, the assumption of a mystical pose at a time when positivistic irreligion was making such inroads upon the life and thought of his contemporaries). Verlaine, as a matter of fact, would seem to have had little, if any, personal acquaintance with Baudelaire; for he was but a lad of seventeen at the time of the publication of *les Fleurs du mal*, and, if he saw him at the gatherings of the Parnassians, to which he had immediately attached himself, he could only have worshipped the master from afar. Verlaine's first volume of verse, *les Poèmes saturniens*, appearing in 1866, could not have caught the notice of Baudelaire, then in the period of mental and physical decrepitude preceding his death. The irony which dogged the great innovator's footsteps throughout his life did not relinquish its hold at the approach of death; for it was Baudelaire's fate to leave the world without having had the opportunity of actually knowing the two poets who were to prove his most distinguished disciples.

Verlaine's declaration to the contrary notwithstanding, it is a truism to call Baudelaire his master; every page of the former's eighteen collections of verse yields irrefutable testimony to the fact that he considered himself the pupil and rightful heir of the composer of *les Fleurs du mal*. Take

¹Verlaine: *Œuvres* (Paris, Messein, 1911, vol. II, p. 349).

the religious poems of Baudelaire and make them a trifle more mystical; take his sensual poems and make them, not more lascivious, nor more perverse—for that could scarcely be possible—but a bit more plain-spoken, a bit more dialectically vulgar, here and there; take his prosody and make it somewhat airier, somewhat more audacious, and often much more obscure; and you have the poetry of Verlaine. The themal predilections of the two men were much the same, their moral weaknesses almost identical. In both we find the same amazing parallelism of religious fervor and sensual unrestraint; in both the same mastery of the difficulties of versification, the same exquisite feeling for musicality of phrasing. If Baudelaire, in his lapses from faith, expressed himself in a spirit of greater rebelliousness, Verlaine, though under the same circumstances pretending the profoundest remorse, was in his life, of the two, probably the greater wanton. Both were irrevocably attached to their art and lived in an ethereal realm from which was banished all thought of the material. Whatever may be our opinion of the two men *qua* men, it can scarcely be denied that they were great poets, perhaps France's greatest purely lyric poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The life of Paul Verlaine, the first half of which is rather individually recounted by the poet himself in his somewhat Rousseauistic *Confessions*² (1895) and the remainder with mingled humor and sadness in *Mes Hôpitaux* (1891), *les Mémoires d'un veuf* (1892), and *Mes Prisons* (1893),³ forms an undelectable narrative, a sad tale of intoxication, depravity, wife-beating and desertion, assault, imprisonment, and a kaleidoscopic succession of hospitals leading to the very threshold of death resulting from a complication of unclean diseases. Characteristically enough, Verlaine, except in his moments of groveling contrition, which were usually of brief duration, was not ashamed of this lurid

²*Œuvres*, vol. IV.

³These three works are contained in vol. V of the *Œuvres*.

record; on the contrary, during the last decade of his life at least, he did all in his power to strengthen the legend that had sprung up and which, picturing him as a satyric combination of François Villon and Edgar Allan Poe, is likely to cling to his name as long as men continue to thrill to the magic of his verse. And as long as his poetry maintains its hold upon lovers of rhyme and metre the world over, Verlaine's addiction to the seven cardinal vices will titillate only the prurient and will be forgiven him in favor of the beauteous visions of life which were vouchsafed him and which he translated into his immortal music.

A proper understanding of the poet's writings, however, can take its foundations only in a knowledge of the basic facts of his life; these, therefore, we shall here pass briefly in review. Verlaine was born in 1844 in the city of Metz, where his father, a captain in the Engineering Corps of the French army, happened at that time to be quartered. He was of good Franco-Belgian stock, and received a solid home-training under the watchful eyes of a mother who was to come to his aid in many an escapade of his later life. Resigning his commission in 1851, Captain Verlaine removed with his family to Paris, where Paul was given an excellent schooling, which terminated in his receiving the *baccalauréat* at the age of eighteen. Perhaps the happiest years of the poet's life were those spent at the lycée Bonaparte (now Condorcet), where he first tried his hand at versification and where he made several friendships which were to last until his death, notably with the poet, Edmond Lepelletier, later a fellow-Parnassian and one of his most sympathetic biographers. Upon his graduation from the *lycée*, he obtained, through his father's influence, a clerkship in the Paris Hôtel de Ville, and he remained a comparatively conscientious and law-abiding employee until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. In the interval, his father had died, leaving Mme. Verlaine in comfortable circumstances, and Paul had already embarked upon the career of versifying and profligacy which were to make him at

once the pride and shame of his nation. Gaining an introduction, probably through Mendès, into the *salons* of Mme. de Ricard and Nina de Callias, he had become an eager Parnassian, as his earlier admiration for *les Cariatides* and *les Fleurs du mal*, for Mendès' *Philoméla* and Glatigny's *les Vignes folles* had forecast. His first two volumes of verse—*les Poèmes saturniens* (1866) and *les Fêtes galantes* (1869)—reveal the Parnassian influence throughout, and, though they received little attention from the reading public, they were enthusiastically hailed by such members of the group as Banville, and Verlaine seemed on the highroad to success.

But Verlaine was temperamentally disinclined to enslave himself to the Parnassian attitude of objectivity; he was far too emotional, too spontaneous, to be able to follow the Parnassian precept: "Haïssez le moi." His first real emotional upheaval, consequently, would undoubtedly bring out the Romantic strain that was so strong in him (in a poem entitled "Dizain mil huit cent trente," he declares: "Je suis né romantique").⁴ As a matter of fact, the year 1869 may be said to close Verlaine's Parnassian period, for it was in that year that he met, and fell violently in love with Mathilde Mauté, the half-sister of the musician, Charles de Sivry, whom Verlaine numbered among his devoted friends. The poet's meeting with Mathilde was a real *coup de foudre*, and it was not long before the two were affianced and talking marriage. Addicted for several years already to the absinthe which was to color his entire life a ghastly green, the poet at once took himself in hand and seemed determined to make himself worthy of the innocent child who was to become his wife. But the hold of the green god was not so easily to be shaken.

The marriage of Verlaine and Mathilde, several times deferred by illness, was precipitated by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the call of all unmarried men under forty-five to the defense of the nation. The first

⁴*Jadis et naguère* (*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 306).

months of married life were a typical "lune de miel"; rarely had the poet been so happy, never again was he to know such unmitigated contentment. Verlaine's adoration burst out at every pore; his pen literally flowed love. The poems written during the year 1869-1870, published under the meaningful title of *la Bonne chanson*, were a veritable pæan of joy and hope, and ushered in the second, purely personal and by far the richest, period of Verlaine's poetic career. But the bliss was fated to be short-lived. During the siege of Paris, Verlaine enlisted in the militia and was assigned to service on the fortifications. Here, in the company of kindred spirits from the slums of the capital, he succumbed to his old weakness, and on several occasions returned to his home so far gone in drink as to terrify, if not even actually to abuse, his wife. Violent quarrels were not uncommon, and it was evident that disaster must, soon or late, overtake the household. The disaster, in fact, was to arrive soon. When the ignominious peace of 1871 was followed by the Commune, Verlaine, although he was in the employ of the municipality, deserted the government, apparently deeming the whole business a mere lark, and joined the ranks of the Communists. It was in this baleful hour that the poet met Rimbaud, a meeting which was to be of the extremest consequence in the shaping of his career. The Communist revolt having been put down, Verlaine was now not only without a position, but actually under pain of imprisonment, perhaps of execution. There was only one avenue of escape—flight; and when, in July, 1872, Rimbaud expressed his willingness to leave Paris with him, Verlaine, who had begun by deserting his government, now, without the slightest compunction, abandoned his wife, though she was pregnant with a son whom the poet was scarcely ever to see, and fled with his Antinous into Belgium.

Jean-Arthur Rimbaud, who, though he was Verlaine's junior by ten years, exerted an amazing influence—largely for evil—over the older poet, was one of the most eccentric geniuses that the France of the highly erratic *fin-de-siècle*

generation produced. Endowed with a poetic gift which was little short of miraculous, he was possessed of a disposition and a temperament that could not tolerate the conventions of social intercourse, the ideals of which he held in the profoundest contempt. Reared by a high-handed mother whose husband had deserted her when Arthur was but six years old, he early began to display his artistic talents and his rebellious nature. Some of his finest poems were written before he was fifteen, and at the age of sixteen, after a quarrel with his mother, he inaugurated a series of disappearances from home which were eventually to result in a complete severance of family ties. Three times he ran away and three times he returned to his home at Charleville, not far from the Belgian border; during his wanderings, he lived the life of a vagabond, even, on one occasion, spending a fortnight in prison. All the while, he was composing his strange poems; the strangest and, together with the always-quoted, never-understood "Sonnet des voyelles" the greatest of them, the "Bateau ivre," written in 1871, he sent to Verlaine, who at once invited him to Paris. The invitation was accepted; from October, 1871, to July, 1872, he haunted the capital, as the guest now of Verlaine, later of Banville, and finally as a soldier in the Communist army. During Rimbaud's stay in Paris, Verlaine introduced him to his Parnassian colleagues, who were inclined to welcome the gifted youth into their midst, but were soon repelled by his anti-social nature and his refusal to observe the most ordinary amenities. It was upon the overthrow of the Commune, as has already been noted, that the two poets decided to take French leave, and, in high spirits, they set out upon a thirteen-month Odyssey through Belgium and the south of England. Mathilde, outraged by her husband's abandonment of her at such a critical period, the climax of his brutal conduct of almost their entire married life, sued for separation. Seemingly this caused Verlaine little concern, for the first few months of his escape were full of the thrills arising from the sight of new

places and especially from his slavish attachment to his inhuman comrade. Verlaine's pen was busy recording the sensations offered by foreign lands, and his mind, for the moment, had room for nothing else. It was not long, however, before Rimbaud, precocious René that he was, tired of the adventure, which now filled him with veritable loathing. His relations with Verlaine were cruelly translated into a prose work which he called *Une Saison en enfer*, and which he published in Belgium in 1873. On several occasions, he left Verlaine to return to Charleville, only to be called back by frantic appeals from the older poet, stricken by disease and languishing alone in a hospital in London. Remorse had begun to eat into Verlaine's soul, and he was desirous of a reconciliation with his wife, still bent upon obtaining a legal separation. Mathilde remained obdurate to all pleas. The poet then turned, in anguish, to his mother and to Rimbaud, both of whom hastened to London. Dismissed from the hospital upon his recovery, Verlaine resumed his "season in hell" with Rimbaud, who treated his senior with cold contempt. Quarrels were frequent and boisterous, and finally, while the two were in Brussels and after Rimbaud had announced his determination to break off the relationship definitively, Verlaine, in what must have been a moment of insanity, fired his revolver at his comrade and seriously wounded him. Though the wound did not prove fatal, and though Rimbaud refused to press a charge of assault, Verlaine, largely because of his participation in the Commune, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment as a menace to society. Rimbaud, in sheer disgust at the whole episode, decided to abandon civilization and literature simultaneously, and the remaining twenty years of his life were spent in vagabonding through Europe and into Africa, where he finally established himself in Abyssinia as a trader in native products, and, to all intents and purposes, assimilated himself to his environment. He refrained from all communication with the literary world of Paris, lived in conjugal state with an Abyssinian woman, amassed some wealth, and attained to the

dignity of unofficial intermediary between France and the African countries he was exploiting. Long after the conclusion of their relations, Verlaine, faithful to the memory of the boy who had so completely enslaved him, brought out, in 1886, a collection of his poems, under the title of *les Illuminations*, which was heralded as the work of a genius by the Symbolist-Decadent groups, in whose eyes Rimbaud immediately assumed the aspect of a deity. But the self-willed pariah refused to hear of this pseudo-posthumous fame, and, after his nineteenth year, never penned a verse. It was with the greatest reluctance that he left Abyssinia for France in 1891, for treatment of a tumor on the knee, and when he did leave, it was too late. He died in a Marseilles hospital eight months after his arrival, in the same spirit of hatred for civilized mankind which had actuated him since childhood.

It is probable that Rimbaud was the only human being whom Verlaine ever really loved. It was the fear of losing this "alter ego" that had prompted the revolver-shot on the streets of Brussels. Once in the prison at Mons, to which he had been consigned, Verlaine began to be consumed with repugnance for the life he had thus far led. Numerous appeals to his wife failed to move her to pity, and the poet now turned for love to the church, which had thus far played so slight a rôle in his life. In a wave of mystical remorse, he made a complete confession to the prison chaplain, from whom he received absolution and admission to divine grace. Like Oscar Wilde, he, too, set about writing a *De Profundis*, which took the form of a series of fervently religious poems that were later published under the title of *Sagesse*. By now, Mathilde had secured her decree of separation, and Verlaine, though he did not lose hope of an eventual reconciliation, devoted himself wholly to his poetic vocation. While in prison, he supervised the publication of his third volume of verse, the exquisite *Romances sans paroles*,⁵ and wrote most of the

⁵Privately printed, by Edmond Lepelletier, in 1874. The volume received almost no attention until the publication of a second edition by Vanier in 1887.

poems later assembled into the collections known as *Sagesse*, *Jadis et naguère*, and *Parallèlement*. His conduct in prison was so exemplary that his two-year sentence was commuted to sixteen months. And thus ended what was perhaps the climactic episode of Verlaine's career.

Upon his release from prison, the poet returned to France, but he was accorded so cool a reception by relatives and former friends that he thought for a moment of hiding his shame in the silences of a Trappist monastery. Discouraged from his plan by the Trappists themselves, Verlaine now entered upon a period of comparative calm which he spent in the somewhat surprising profession of pedagogue, at first in England, later in the north of France. For more than a year, he was the respected tutor of a provincial English family; then, after a brief experience in an English private school, where he was the butt of the jokes and sneers of the older boys, he obtained the position of master in the Collège de Notre-Dame at Reims in the Ardennes. His longing for monastic seclusion was in a fair way to being gratified here, and for two years he enjoyed peace of mind and body. This sojourn was especially brightened by the friendship which the poet formed with one of the older students, Lucien Létinois, upon whom he showered all the affection which his wife's obduracy prevented his bestowing upon their son. The prospect of Lucien's impending graduation from the college so terrified Verlaine that he fell an easy victim to his ingrained weakness, which he had, to all appearances, conquered, and after several swinish performances superinduced by absinthe, he was expelled from the Notre-Dame faculty. Reluctant to return to Paris, Verlaine purchased a farm, with the help of funds supplied by his mother, and, taking with him young Létinois, whom he actually adopted as his son, sought peace in the cultivation of the soil. But, as might well have been expected, Verlaine was no more dependable as a farmer than he had proved as government clerk, husband, and teacher. The venture was foredoomed to failure, and Verlaine and his adopted son made their way to Paris,

where, before long, Lucien was stricken with typhoid fever and succumbed, leaving the poet in the depths of the most genuine grief he was ever to experience.⁶

Verlaine now induced his mother, who had been leading a quiet existence at Arras, to settle in the Parisian suburb of Boulogne-sur-Seine. At first he seemed anxious to undo his earlier mistakes and to strive towards the establishment of a solid reputation as a poet. He cast about him for a publisher for the volume of religio-mystical poems he had composed during and since his imprisonment; the recognized publishing houses, however, would have nothing to do with this ex-convict, and it was an obscure printer of Catholic manuals who brought out, in 1881, the first edition of *Sagesse*; this edition naturally passed almost totally unnoticed. Verlaine then began to absent himself more and more from Boulogne-sur-Seine; his days were, for the most part, spent in the Latin Quarter, at the Café François Premier; his nights, more often than not, were also spent in the capital, in the room of one or another of the long succession of light-o'-loves with whom he consorted in the ever-deluding hope of finding companionship in love. The aura of vice created by the numberless experiences of his past had taken shape in a gigantic legend which attracted the newer schools of poets about him and, for a time, he enjoyed a success which he did all in his power to heighten by exaggerated tales of his erotic and bibular prowess. Periodicals welcomed contributions, in both prose and verse, from his pen, and he dashed off, frequently on the backs of old envelopes while sitting at his favorite table in the café, lascivious poems or memoirs and quasi-critical articles which were later collected into such volumes as the *Mémoires d'un veuf* and the *Poètes maudits*. An article on Rimbaud and another treating of himself under the thinly-disguised anagram of "Pauvre Lélian" made of the two men the twin gods of the gaping young poets. Verlaine was in a fair way to becoming the literary lion of Paris when

⁶Vide the poems to Lucien Létinois in the collection entitled *Amour* (1888—*Œuvres*, vol. II, pp. 73-74, 75, 84-85, 88, 89, 92-119).

suddenly, without warning, he again withdrew from the capital, having induced his mother to sink what little money she had left in the purchase of another farm. The enterprise was a failure from its very inception; Verlaine, as usual, drank heavily and quarreled violently with his mother, whose generous leniency had enabled him to live in profligate idleness. The poet's conduct was unspeakable and, on one occasion, he so far forgot himself as to attack a neighbor who had intervened between himself and his mother; the result was a heavy fine and a one-month imprisonment. It would seem impossible to sink lower.

Restored to liberty, Verlaine again returned to Paris, where he had the excellent fortune of being taken under the wing of Léon Vanier, an astute publisher who, like Lemerre, felt that there was money to be earned from the publication of poetry, especially of Verlaine's poetry. After the publication of *Jadis et naguère* in 1884, Vanier brought out a score of volumes of prose and verse of Verlaine's composition for which he paid enough to enable the poet to indulge himself in all his weaknesses but never enough to live in anything but the shabbiest wretchedness (although it is probably true that, no matter how much Verlaine might have been paid, he would have squandered it all on absinthe and women). It was at this time that Verlaine was first brought low with arthritis of the knee, the disease which was to cling like a leech to his worn frame and was to prove one of the contributory causes of his death. Upon the demise of his mother in 1886, Verlaine was left alone and destitute. The last ten years of his life he spent alternately between the Café François Premier, where the younger poets took huge delight in urging him into a state of loquacious intoxication during which he prated immoderately of his experiences and his writings, and the various hospitals, particularly the Hôpital Broussais, whither he retired with greater and greater frequency for treatment, at the public expense, of his painful ailment. When not in the hospital, Verlaine lived in the meanest of the Latin Quarter garrets, with frequent removals to escape the payment of rent, and

sharing his misery with any woman who would show, or seem to show, the slightest sympathy with his predicament. By now virtually a dipsomaniac, Verlaine, in his lucid intervals, poured out a seemingly endless stream of poetry, most of it reeking with senile lasciviousness but all of it snatched up by Vanier who, making capital of his protégé's lurid reputation, turned out volume after worthless volume, much to the disgust of the poet's few genuine friends. Truly Verlaine was living up to his reputation of a fantastic Villon-Poe.

The parallelism between the lives of Verlaine and Baudelaire is, of course, unescapable; and it was heightened when, in 1892, Verlaine undertook a lecture-tour through Holland, England, and Belgium. But, unlike Baudelaire, Verlaine was listened to with the dignity befitting one of his country's greatest living poets and his trip proved an undoubted "succès d'estime." As a consequence of the homage which was paid him wherever he delivered his lectures on contemporaneous French letters, Verlaine's stock rose considerably at home. In 1895, he was accorded the mythical honor of election as "Prince des poètes," and the government expressed more tangible approval in the form of a pension. This windfall enabled the poet to spend the last year of his life in comparative comfort, though it took all the craftiness of one mistress, Eugénie Krantz, with whom he was living at this period and in whose arms he was to die, to prevent him from being constantly robbed by another mistress, a cruel shrew called Philomène Boudin. Truly a strange sight, this, of a man fifty-one years old, prematurely aged by excesses and debauches, his whole frame corroded by disease, still offering himself the luxury of two mistresses, working himself into ecstasies over their doubtful physical charms, and attempting to play the rôle of Casanova to both! A creature of impulses and emotions, to whom everything that smacked of logic and propriety was anathema, Verlaine was all his life a child. If the life of a great poet need any justification, Verlaine's is to be found in his childish irresponsibility, his blithe indifference to

the moral codes of the gregarious animal known as man. Small wonder, then, that when, on January 8, 1896, Verlaine succumbed to the army of diseases which had arrayed themselves for a final attack, the manner of his life was immediately forgotten, and that great and small united to honor his remains. The government continued its belated amends by ordering a pompous funeral; the pallbearers included the poet's life-long friend Lepelletier, Mendès, and the highly respectable Coppée; and the body was followed to its last resting-place by a throng of mourners in which scarlet women of the Latin Quarter rubbed shoulders with the leading French *littérateurs* of the day.

The life of Verlaine has been recounted in such detail, not because of its rather unenviable scabrousness but because, without a clear-cut picture of his career, the poet's work would lose much of its meaning. For Verlaine's poetry was the instantaneous, one is almost tempted to say dictaphonic, recording of his emotions and experiences. In respect at least to the immediateness of its response to stimuli from the outer world and to the simplicity and directness with which this response was attired, Verlaine's art bears the stamp of greatness which, many present-day students of æsthetics are agreed, is so strikingly to be found in the artistic creations of primitive natures and civilizations.

Before winning, however, to this spontaneity and to this primordial unashamedness of one's own nudity, whether mental or physical, Verlaine, as has already been stated, had to pass through a preliminary stage. Like Sully Prudhomme, like Anatole France, Verlaine was one of those who learned to stretch his poetic wings under the tutelage of the songbirds of Parnassus, but who, as soon as these same wings had attained their full strength, abandoned the nest and followed his own course through the ether. And yet, although he was later to become the leader of the Decadent group of poets, whose efforts represented a distinct revolt against Parnassianism, Verlaine all his life cherished the warmest memories of his beginnings as a member of the

band which collaborated in the production of *le Parnasse contemporain*. In his *Confessions* (1895), he recalls with delight his first reading of the poems of Baudelaire, Banville, Mendès, and Glatigny. The latter two poets especially proved the lodestones of his youth. "Car quel camarade," he exclaims, "en attendant d'être combien ami, me fut Catulle Mendès, et quel ami avant qu'il fût camarade me devint tout de suite Albert Glatigny."⁷ And one of the chapters of *les Mémoires d'un veuf*, "Du Parnasse contemporain," is a racy narrative of the formation of the group and the publication of the first two *Recueils* (Verlaine was not represented in the 1876 anthology, the *Parnasse contemporain*, now grown respectable, apparently fearing the soilure that might come from contact with a jailbird). It was as a Parnassian that Verlaine composed the verses contained in his first volume, *Poèmes saturniens*, which was brought out by Lemerre, the publisher of the Parnassians. In a prefatory poem to this volume, Verlaine recalled the lore of the astrologers, according to whom those born under the sign of Saturn are destined to a large share of unhappiness and of bile. Even at this early age (the poet was twenty-two at the time of the publication of the *Poèmes saturniens*), Verlaine had guessed what life had in store for him; for the volume is full of the undefined melancholy and the vague longings of the best Romantic traditions. The titles of the subdivisions of the *Poèmes saturniens* are characteristic; one group is headed "Melancholia," another "Eaux-fortes," a third "Paysages tristes"; in other words, the pictorial poetry of Leconte de Lisle colored by the "mal du siècle" of René. And already in this maiden volume, Verlaine revealed himself the master of rhymes and rhythms, the musician of words and the painter of figures. Listen, for example, to "Marine":

"l'Océan sonore
 Palpite sous l'œil
 De la lune en deuil
 Et palpite encore,

⁷*Œuvres*, vol. IV, p. 84.

Tandis qu'un éclair
 Brutal et sinistre
 Fend le ciel de bistre
 D'un long zigzag clair,

Et que chaque lame,
 En bonds convulsifs,
 Le long des récifs,
 Va, vient, luit, et clame,

Et qu'au firmament,
 Ou l'ouragan erre,
 Rugit le tonnerre
 Formidablement."⁸

Contrast the effect of the monosyllabic twelfth verse with the vigor of the single word forming the concluding line of the poem. Or read aloud the "Chanson d'automne," almost too well known to bear quoting:

"Les sanglots longs
 Des violons
 De l'automne
 Blessent mon cœur
 D'une langueur
 Monotone.

Tout suffocant
 Et blême, quand
 Sonne l'heure,
 Je me souviens
 Des jours anciens
 Et je pleure;

Et je m'en vais
 Au vent mauvais
 Qui m'emporte
 Deçà, delà,
 Pareil à la
 Feuille morte."⁹

The use of the words "quand" and "la" in the rhyming position shows us a Verlaine already emancipated from the

⁸*Ibid.*, I, 21.

⁹*Ibid.*, I, pp. 33-34.

hidebound rules of classical French versification, and prognosticates the leader of the *Décadents*.

Most of the *Poèmes saturniens*, thus, are either descriptive or cosmically elegiac, in the best Parnassian manner. Even the Indophilism of Leconte de Lisle finds an echo in the volume, in the poem called "Çavitri."¹⁰ But the personal note is not entirely absent. There is, especially, the fine poem, "Mon rêve familier," with its well-known opening lines:

"Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant
D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime;"¹¹

there are "A une femme," and "Sérénade";¹² there is "Il Bacio," which begins:

"Baiser! rose trémière au jardin des caresses!"¹³

and which may have suggested to Rostand the celebrated metaphor of the kiss: "le point rose sur l'i du verbe aimer." On the whole, however, the *Poèmes saturniens* are broadly impersonal. Verlaine's second volume, *Fêtes galantes*, is also in the Parnassian style; it is a collection of miniatures of that diaphanous court-life which formed the theme of the paintings of Watteau, and, as in the case of the painter, is important not at all for its subject-matter but for the mastery over his tools displayed by the artist. We find Verlaine toying with verse-lengths, rhyme-schemes, and stanzaic forms of a dazzling variety; the poet, very evidently, had not read his Banville in vain.

It may be well for us, at this point, to abandon, for the while, the consideration of Verlaine's poetry in the chronological order of its publication in order to pass to a volume which, while below the standard set by the poet's best work, is significant as containing his artistic credo. The volume

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 16 and 49.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 54.

is *Jadis et naguère*, which served as the receptacle for an ill-assorted *mélange* of lyric, dramatic, and narrative verse written during the ten years preceding its appearance; the artistic credo is to be found in "l'Art poétique,"¹⁴ the only poem of the collection which has survived. In two lines, Verlaine here sums up his entire poetics. We read:

"De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair."

The second verse is even more striking than the first; for, while earlier poets may not have expressed the notion in so many words, none was ignorant of the inseparability of poetry and music. Especially is this true of Baudelaire, who, in his critical writings, insisted upon this point. But Verlaine was certainly one of the first to postulate formally that the ineluctable essential of poetry is its musicality. That he put his theory into constant practice we have already had the opportunity to observe. Verlaine's penchant for the "Impair," the masculine verse made up of an odd number of syllables (the poet long after boasted jocularly: "J'ai fait un vers de dix-sept pieds")¹⁵ was one of the phenomena which encouraged the *vers-librists* in breaking away from the tradition that poetry is a regular alternation of rhythmic stresses, and made possible that present day "free-verse" which is so often totally undistinguishable from prose. The "Art poétique," which, it should be noted, is written in the "Impair," contains other important precepts. The second stanza, for example, contains the entire theory of the Symbolists:

"Il faut aussi que tu n'aïlles point
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise;
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise
Ou l'Indécis au Précis se joint."

¹⁴*Ibid.*, I, p. 313.

¹⁵*Epigrammes* (*Œuvres*, III, 236). The verse actually has seventeen syllables, not feet, and runs: "Du distingue: c'est bon, rire. Et c'est meilleur encore, aimer vos vers!"

And further:

"Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!"

The distance Verlaine had now traveled from his Parnassian springboard is startlingly evidenced by this insistence upon the substitution of shades (broken colors the modernist painter would call them) for the pure color of the pictorial schools. The Hugonian love of verbiage and rhetoric Verlaine assassinates in one line:

"Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou."

And the poem concludes with the fine stanza:

"Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Eparse au vent crispé du matin
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym—
Et tout le reste est littérature."

In the very year in which *Fêtes galantes* was published, Verlaine made the acquaintance of Mathilde Mauté. The effect was miraculous. Banished at once were the precocious cynicism and ennui of the Parnassian; life called the poet through all the silvery trumpets, all the gleaming colors, of love. Nature decked herself out in her most gorgeous raiment; and Verlaine was athrob with the prospect of entering, hand in hand with his gracious one, his embowered Eden. All the sluices of the poet's emotions were now opened, and he poured forth his soul in a stream of love-songs, many of which take their place among the best in the language. *La Bonne chanson*¹⁸ fairly exudes the joy of first love, the assurance of certain and imperishable happiness. Nature reveals herself only in her most ethereally blissful aspects, poured into the delicate moulds of the purest of musical verse:

¹⁸Lemerre, as usual, in the rôle of editorial Ganymede to the Parnassian Verlaine.

"Avant que tu t'en ailles,
Pâle étoile du matin,
... Mille cailles
Chantent, chantent dans le thym—

Tourne devers le poète,
Dont les yeux sont pleins d'amour,
... L'alouette
Monte au ciel avec le jour—

Tourne ton regard que noie
L'aurore dans son azur,
... Quelle joie
Parmi les champs de blé mur! ...

Puis fais luire ma pensée
Là-bas, bien loin, oh: bien loin
... La rosée
Gaîment brille sur le foin ...

Dans le doux rêve où s'agite
Ma mie endormie encor ...
... Vite, vite,
Car voici le soleil d'or!"¹⁷

Or consider this oft-quoted gem:

"La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois;
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramé ...

O bien-aimée.

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure. ...

Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

¹⁷*Œuvres*, I, p. 125.

Un vaste et tendre
 Apaisement
 Semble descendre
 Du firmament
 Que l'astre irise. . . .

C'est l'heure exquise."¹⁸

Indeed, *la Bonne chanson* itself is an "exquisite hour."

But Verlaine's "heure exquise" was, like all else, fleeting and transitory. Murderer of his own conjugal happiness, besotted vagabond comrade of an eccentric lad, ludicrous villain in a ten-penny street brawl, the poet sat in the prison at Mons with his gorgeous world of love and beauty crashing about his ears. The memories of his year of betrothal tugged mercilessly at his heartstrings, and he would fain know again those vanished joys. In this mood, he composed a series of elegiac poems of such elusively delicate melody that he must needs give them a name from the literature of music. And so we have *Romances sans paroles*, published during his imprisonment, a volume which might be styled a transposition into the minor key of *la Bonne chanson*. In place of the song of the lark at dawn, we have the following:

"O triste, triste, était mon âme
 A cause, à cause d'une femme."¹⁹

And the "exquisite hour" has made way for a season of languorous sadness, as translated into the following thing of beauty:²⁰

"Il pleure dans mon cœur
 Comme il pleut sur la ville
 Quelle est cette langueur
 Qui pénètre mon cœur?

 O bruit doux de la pluie
 Par terre et sur les toits!
 Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,
 O le chant de la pluie!

¹⁸*Ibid.*, I, 127-28.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, I, p. 161.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 155.

Il pleure sans raison
 Dans ce cœur qui s'écœure.
 Quoi! nulle trahison?
 Ce deuil est sans raison.

C'est bien la pire peine
 De ne savoir pourquoi,
 Sans amour et sans haine,
 Mon cœur a tant de peine!"

Despite his misery, the poet pardons his young wife her impatience with his weaknesses and determines to bear his sufferings in silence.

"Aussi bien pourquoi me mettrais-je à geindre?
 Vous ne m'aimez pas, l'affaire est conclue,
 Et, ne voulant pas qu'on ose me plaindre,
 Je souffrirai d'une âme résolue.

Oui, je souffrirai, car je vous aimais!
 Mais je souffrirai comme un bon soldat
 Blessé, qui s'en va dormir à jamais,
 Plein d'amour pour quelque pays ingrat."²¹

And Verlaine was left to glean what satisfaction he might from this spirit of self-righteousness.

Abandoned by his wife, who re-married not many years after having procured her divorce from the poet, Verlaine was never again to know a truly innocent love. The failure of his marital venture was a great pity; for, as he long after confessed: "J'ai la fureur d'aimer. Mon cœur si faible est fou."²² This passion for affection the poet sought uninterruptedly to still, first in the bosom of the Church, then on the breasts of whatever wanton might appear to smile on him in his misery. As disillusionment accumulated with the passing years, Verlaine's ideal of love was dragged lower and lower into the mire of carnality. And so we have him, a prematurely old man of fifty, grinding out poems of the most lubricious sensuality, in which the sexual act is often all but described, and always in the sentimental hyperboles of the senile *viveur*. As records of the

²¹"Birds in the Night" (*Œuvres*, I, 178).

²²*Amour* (*Œuvres*, II, 80).

liaisons of his old age, with their attendant orgies of the senses, drunken bouts, and brutal quarrels, such volumes as *Chansons pour elle* (1891), *Elégies* and *Odes en son honneur* (1893), *Dans les limbes* (1894) and the posthumous *Chair* (1896) may be reliable; monotonous they certainly are, and practically valueless as poetry. The spontaneity of youth was no more; and the thought of this old man lashing himself into a fury of sensual passion in the arms of disease-consumed viragoes of the streets is little short of nauseating. Fortunately, the poet himself experienced intervals of self-disgust, during which he sought an outlet for his emotions in the fervors of religion. It is to Verlaine the mystic that we shall now turn our attention.

In the vast silences of the Mons prison, tormented by the loss of his one genuine source of happiness and by remorse for the frivolity of his youth, Verlaine sought healing in the revivifying waters of salvation. His desire for a return to grace was so fervent and his accounts of his communions with God so mystical that the prison-chaplain was inclined to treat them with suspicion. Convinced, finally, of the sincerity of the poet's request and the genuineness of his contrition, the priest received the lamb into the fold. The poet, washed clean of his sins, now abandoned himself to an ecstatic outpouring of his new-found bliss and to a vigorous denunciation of his misspent youth in a series of poems which were to compose *Sagesse*, the volume which is by many considered his masterpiece and which undeniably takes rank among his greatest achievements. The bulk of the poems is deeply religious, almost liturgical in tone, and is strongly reminiscent of the Davidic psalms. Verlaine rings all the changes on the themes of humility, remorse, spiritual suffering and release. Now he cries out: "Dieu des humbles, sauvez cet enfant de colère!"²³ Now he declares that he should have lived in the Middle Ages, that epoch of Catholicism's omnipotence, "loin de nos jours d'esprit charnel et de chair triste."²⁴ Again he exclaims:

²³*Œuvres*, I, 209.

²⁴*Ibid.*, I, 215.

"Je ne veux plus aimer que ma mère Marie."²⁵ And always there sounds the note of overpowering longing for the peace that is to be found under the shelter of the wings of the Almighty.

That this ardor was not factitious is scarcely to be doubted, and again, as in *la Bonne chanson* and *Romances sans paroles*, we have the spectacle of Verlaine sublimating his innermost emotions in verses of iridescent beauty. If we were to evaluate, however, the individual poems of *Sagesse*, we might be somewhat surprised to discover that the finest of them are not the strictly religious compositions, which are *ipso facto* of a rather cut-and-dried nature, but those in which the poet dissects his more terrestrial emotions. The title of one of Verlaine's later volumes, *Parallèlement* (1889), gives us the key to *Sagesse*, indeed to the poet's general psychic make-up. During the latter half of his life, his soul was a battleground upon which mystical exaltation and earthly concupiscence waged an uninterrupted struggle for hegemony. Even during the gloomy days of Mons, Verlaine's thoughts frequently traveled earthward. Often the image of his wife floated into his dream-haunted cell. And he called out to her, in desperation:

"Les chères mains qui furent miennes,
Toutes petites, toutes belles,
Après ces méprises mortelles
Et toutes ces choses païennes,

Après les rades et les grèves,
Et les pays et les provinces,
Royales mieux qu'au temps des princes,
Les chères mains m'ouvrent les rêves.

Mains en songe, mains sur mon âme,
Sais-je, moi, ce que vous daignâtes,
Parmi ses rumeurs scélérates,
Dire à cette âme qui se pâme?

²⁵*Ibid.*, I, 249.

Ment-elle, ma vision chaste
 D'affinité spirituelle,
 De complicité maternelle,
 D'affection étroite et vaste?

Remords si cher, peine très bonne,
 Rêves bénits, mains consacrées,
 O ces mains, ses mains vénérées,
 Faites le geste qui pardonne!"²⁶

Sometimes a gleam of hope would come to light up the abyss.

"L'espoir luit comme un brin de paille dans l'étable. . . .
 Ah! quand refleuriront les roses de septembre?"²⁷

More often, blackness filled the soul of the poet, despairing of both divine and human love.

"Un grand sommeil noir
 Tombe sur ma vie:
 Dormez, tout Espoir,
 Dormez, toute Envie!

Je ne vois plus rien.
 Je perds la mémoire
 Du mal et du bien
 O la triste histoire!

Je suis un berceau
 Qu'une main balance
 Au creux d'un caveau
 Silence, silence!"²⁸

Such a poem partakes of the supreme inevitability of all great art. The same economy of expression, the same poignant directness of observation, without the remotest touch of bombast, are to be noted in what is by many held to be Verlaine's most beautiful single poem:

²⁶*Œuvres*, I, 230-31.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 272.

"Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,
Si bleu, si calme!
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit
Berce sa palme.

La cloche, dans le ciel qu'on voit,
Doucement tinte.
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit
Chante sa plainte.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là
Simple et tranquille.
Cette paisible rumeur-là
Vient de la ville.

. . . Qu'as-tu fait, ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà
De ta jeunesse?"²⁹

Though Verlaine remained until death a professedly devout Catholic, the ecstasy attendant upon his conversion in prison soon lost its edge, and it was not long after his re-entrance into the world of policed civilization that he had slipped back into the embrace of all his old habits. As was the case with carnal passion, his love of Heaven became a stereotyped emotion, so that both were able to live amicably side by side, "parallèlement," without seeming to feel the least embarrassment. Verlaine continued to write religious poetry, as he continued to write love poetry. But as love had degenerated into mere eroticism, so religion had faded off into a washed-out sentimentalism. Thus, the love celebrated in *Amour* (1888), though presumably of celestial inspiration, lacks the Promethean fire that animated *la Bonne chanson* and *Sagesse*; *Amour* rises to real heights only in the group of poems inspired by the death of Lucien Létinois, and *Bonheur* (the last of Verlaine's important achievements in verse) is actually an elegy for the lost happiness of the days of his betrothal. In the interval between the publication of these two volumes, the poet brought out

²⁹*Ibid.*, I, 273.

Parallèlement, in which he emulated Baudelaire in singing the unnatural delights of Sodom and Gomorrah; thus, "Laeti et errabundi"³⁰ is an *ex-post-facto* record of the poet's experiences during his escapade with Rimbaud; and the concluding poem is a "Ballade Sappho," in which Verlaine unabashedly repeats, by way of refrain: "Je suis pareil à la grande Sappho."³¹ Two years later, in a volume which was published very shortly after *Bonheur*, Verlaine's fall from grace was again complete; his mysticism had been shed *in toto*, as the serpent sloughs off its skin.

"Je fus mystique et je ne le fus plus
(La femme m'aura repris tout entier),
O le temps béni quand j'étais ce mystique."³²

There remains for us only to cast a glance at Verlaine's efforts as a satiric poet, contained in the posthumous *Invec-tives* (1896), for which Banville's *Odes funambulesques* may well have served as model. One scarcely knows which of the two, poet or publisher (Vanier, as usual), deserves the harsher excoriations for the perpetration of so thoroughly tasteless a volume. It contains, among other things, a shameless attack upon Leconte de Lisle, on the occasion of his election to the Academy,³³ and several other "invec-tives," in equally poor form, directed at the Swiss-French novelist and critic, Edouard Rod. Others who felt the sting of these barbed shafts were the poets Moréas, René Ghil, and their compeers of the numerous literary groups which sprang up like mushrooms in the wake of the Symbolists and the Decadents, Brunetière, Vanier, and sundry other shining lights in the realms of literature and politics. The point of it all seems to have been that Verlaine, weary unto death of being held up to scorn as a social pariah by the

³⁰*Œuvres*, II, 197-201.

³¹*Ibid.*, II, 204-05.

³²*Ibid.*, II, 345. Verlaine published another volume of religious poetry, *Liturgies intimes* (1892), but this is far inferior to its predecessors.

³³"Portrait académique" (*Œuvres*, III, 320).

more self-respecting *littérateurs* of the day, determined to have his little revenge and that his tongue, trained by years of brawls with meretricious mistresses, could now utter nothing but foul insults. The delicious poet of *la Bonne chanson*, the contrite psalmist of *Sagesse*, had fallen, body and soul, into the mire. Well for him that death cut short the execution of worse infamies!

It is scarcely necessary, after the numerous citations here given from Verlaine's works, to expatiate upon the qualities that made of him, at his best, one of the greatest of France's lyric poets. His exceeding, often all-too-excessive, emotionality, his subtle sensitiveness to the phenomenal world, his feeling for the musicality of words and rhythms, the vividness and aptness of his figures, and his complete mastery of the technique of prosody—these we have had sufficient opportunity to study. All that remains is to show how close Verlaine came, without ever actually allying himself with them, to being himself one of those *vers-librists* whom he so scorned and whose existence, against his own wishes, he largely made possible. Especially as he grew older did he take liberties with the traditional rules of French versification, even as modified by Hugo and the Parnassians. Noteworthy are his predilection for the "Impair" and for the use of unstressed words and syllables in rhyme-position and at the cæsura. Towards the end of his career, he was guilty of far greater audacities than these. We find him employing the inverted sonnet (one in which the two tercets precede the two quatrains); using assonance instead of rhyme;³⁴ purposely indulging in incorrect rhymes;³⁵ and, finally, writing "Vers sans rimes."³⁶ All these were but so many steps in the direction of releasing rhymed verse from its fetters and preparing it for its metamorphosis into free verse. The poets who sat at the feet of the *Décadent*, Verlaine, were quick to sense the logical consequences of the master's untraditional manipulation of the

³⁴Vide "Assonances galantes" in *Chair* (*Œuvres*, III, 287).

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 289.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 300.

prosodic tools. We shall note, in our final chapter, the use made of these same tools by the disciples of Verlaine.

If we have devoted more space to Verlaine than to any of his Parnassian predecessors or companions, it is not merely because his published work bulks so large, but principally because he is easily the best illustration of the virtues and defects of Parnassianism. On the one hand, he strikingly reveals the anomalousness of the lyric poet's attempting to exclude himself from his work; Leconte de Lisle and Heredia to the contrary notwithstanding, the two things form a contradiction in terms. On the other hand, Verlaine's finest verse was a telling argument in defense of the Parnassian insistence upon the value of poetry for its own sake. "What boots it," Banville and Mendès and even Anatole France might be imagined to have exclaimed, "that the man who wrote '*Les sanglots longs des violons*' and '*La lune blanche luit dans les bois*' and '*Le son du cor s'afflige vers les bois*' divided his life between the cabaret, the house of ill-fame, the hospital, and the prison? That after his experience as a government-clerk, he never earned what is commonly termed a decent living, and that, consequently, judged by the material standards in vogue since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, he was a failure and an outcast? Was he not one of the greatest creative geniuses of the nineteenth century?" To which rhetorical questions a presumable answer might be that there have been great creative geniuses who did not sink into the mire in which Verlaine wallowed. But was not Verlaine in royal company—what with Villon and Rabelais, Byron and the all-too-little-known Gérard de Nerval, Edgar Allan Poe and Baudelaire? The point remains, to whichever side in the oft-raised dispute one might incline, that Verlaine, in his loftiest moments, was the Schumann-Chopin of French poetry, that he had a genuine love for art that is sorely lacking in this age of ours, and that, like Baudelaire, he was the inspiration of much that is valuable in contemporary art. We may well be thankful for the beauty of Verlaine's

vision in the days of his vigor; as for the man: "requiescat in pace."

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

Paul Verlaine, we have just seen, shared Baudelaire's contempt for the every-day and the trivial, the middle-of-the-road and the proper. Living in the world and partaking hungrily of what he considered its joys, he was, nevertheless, distinctly not of the world. The real world of Verlaine was his poetry; the world of reality was to him a worthless bauble. This conception of life, as opposed to the scientific positivism of the realists, served as the basis of those literary movements known as Symbolism and Decadence, which have already frequently been mentioned in the course of this study and which it is our intention, in a later chapter, to scrutinize somewhat more carefully. It should merely be noted at this point that the two most widely-acclaimed leaders of the Symbolist-Decadent groups, who both by precept and example blazed the way for a new and striking development in French lyric poetry, were disciples of Baudelaire. Upon one of those, Verlaine, we have already expatiated, perhaps too discursively. The acquaintance of the second, Stéphane Mallarmé, we are about to make. Between these two poets, as unlike both in their mode of life and in their manner of literary expression as two men living in the same age and writing in the same tongue well could be, others of Baudelaire's disciples might serve as intermediaries. There is, for example, the impecunious yet none the less proud Philippe-Auguste-Mathias de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1840-1889), who could trace his genealogy back eight centuries and who numbered among his ancestors the founder of the Knights of Malta. This Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, who should, with Verlaine, have lived during the Middle Ages and who had been projected into a world of material interests which recked little of high lineage, noble breeding and conduct, or, worst of all, lofty thoughts, was a poet who was destined to write almost exclusively in prose, but in a prose of such poetic qualities

that he was rightfully claimed as one of their own by the Symbolist group. Like Verlaine, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam made his literary *début* with two volumes of verse of a definitely Parnassian tinge (*Premières poésies*, 1856-1858, and *Fantaisies nocturnes*, 1864), and he is represented in the *Parnasse contemporain* of 1866 and 1869. The disciples of Baudelaire, however, evidently were not entirely at their ease "chez Lemerre," and so Villiers abandoned the Parnassians to go his own way. That way lay in the direction of Symbolistic prose, in the cultivation of which, inasmuch as it does not come within the scope of this work, we must leave him, to turn to a consideration of the second truly important literary offspring of Baudelaire, Mallarmé.

As variegated and as malodorous as was the life of Verlaine, so uneventful and conventional was that of Stéphane Mallarmé. Born in Paris in 1842, of a studious temperament and with literary inclinations, Mallarmé prepared himself for the pedagogical profession and enjoyed an honorable career as professor of English at various *lycées* and *collèges* (notably the lycée Condorcet in Paris). His leisure he devoted to profound cogitations on the function of poetry and to the composition of his occasional works in verse and in prose. He was probably, like Verlaine, because of his youth, only an interested spectator at the Parnassian gatherings, under whose inspiration he wrote his first verses; poems from his pen are to be found in the 1866 and 1869 *Recueils*. If he knew Baudelaire at all, it was only as pupil knows master and undoubtedly with the same awe. Breaking away before very long from the Parnassian *milieu*, Mallarmé, after his marriage, inaugurated a *cénacle* of his own in his apartment in the rue de Rome, where, for many years, regularly each Tuesday evening, he received the poets of the Symbolist group and, as their revered leader, guided and encouraged them in their gropings after a new æsthetics. Upon the death of Verlaine in 1896, Mallarmé received from his shoulders the mantle of "Prince des poètes," an honor which he retained until his death two years later.

The same antipodal contrast which marks the lives of Verlaine and Mallarmé is to be found operating in their literary performances. In the space of thirty years, Verlaine signed his name to almost as many volumes;¹ Mallarmé, on the other hand, in an equal period of time, wrote a scant hundred poems² and a meagre volume of prose-poems and essays.³ Like Baudelaire and Flaubert, Mallarmé was so "féru de perfection" and so critical of his own achievement that he could not give free rein to his talents, and preferred to remain silent rather than to express himself imperfectly. This paucity of production is not the only basis of resemblance between Mallarmé and Baudelaire. Both men cherished an inordinate admiration for the work of Poe, some of whose poems Mallarmé translated with a skill equaling that of Baudelaire's rendition of the short stories; both men, too, made surpassing use of the prose-poem *genre*. But it is in their conception of the relative position of art and life that the two poets show themselves most strikingly akin. The Mallarmean extension of the notion of art for its own sake, inherited from Flaubert and the Parnassians, is one of the most interesting literary phenomena of the declining century and deserves our especial attention.

Mallarmé's understanding of the function of poetry may be said to have described a semi-circular arc, at the two axes of which stand Parnassianism and Symbolism. The youth who listened open-mouthed to the good-humoredly noisy debates in the "entresol du Parnasse" must have carried away with him the feeling that great poetry must be representative and evocative—must represent, as with colors on canvas, the beauteous moments of nature and of life, must evoke, by the use of pictorial phrases and images, their fleeting phenomena. But he could not be entirely con-

¹Most of them, of course, were very slender, and, for the edition of the complete works, they were all comfortably packed into five volumes.

²*Poésies* (10th ed., Paris, *Nouvelle revue française*, 1910).

³*Divagations* (Paris, Charpentier, 1912).

vinced. Is, after all, the highest duty of poetry the stirring of men's emotions by the painting of pictures, by the fixation of moods and passions, and by the cogitation of eternal truths? Should she not rather, like music, superinduce in the reader, by the use of suggestive symbols, a free play of the imagination, whereby he may wander at will through a universe of his own creation? Does not the poet thereby make poets of all his listeners, thus infinitely enriching the emotional life of the individual and augmenting the sum total of the emotional reactions of mankind? These, and many other questions, the young Mallarmé must have asked himself, and his answers left him at such variance with the Parnassian æsthetics that he abandoned the group and called into being one of his own. The motto of the new group might well have been: "To represent is to destroy, to suggest is to create." The poets of this school based their choice of words, not upon their denotative vigor, but upon their connotative wealth. The provenience of the American Imagists is at once apparent. Unfortunately, however, since no two men's minds work in precisely the same way, no two words, when used symbolically, connote precisely the same thing to any two men. The poet, employing a symbol to convey his idea to his reader, frequently suggests to him an entirely different notion, and even more often, perhaps, suggests to him nothing at all. Especially when that poet is Mallarmé, who disdained to reveal the connecting links between his symbols and his ideas and whose mind naturally followed paths of thought foreign to the ordinary reader, the inevitable result is—chaos. Mallarmé had carried to its logical consequence the basic Parnassian theory; taking the notion of poetry for its own sake, he had advanced to that of mere sounds for their own sake. Herein lie both the weakness and the strength of the Symbolistic æsthetics.

Mallarmé's poetry, thus, represents an uninterrupted progression in incomprehensibility. His earlier verses, while far removed from the clear-cut precision of Baudelaire and the almost childlike simplicity of Verlaine, may

be grasped without much effort; the products of his maturity are totally devoid of meaning to any but the most enthusiastic initiate, and even he, approaching his task with the fervor of the mathematician solving a problem in advanced calculus, usually supplies his own key to the enigma. Mallarmé's insistence upon expressing himself in his own medium, his total indifference to the size of his reading public, and his unswerving refusal to descend to a lower level for the mere purpose of enlarging that public and thereby endowing his work with monetary value, represents a noble immolation of self upon the altar of art. The question of the value of poetry which makes so esoterically limited an appeal must be answered for himself by each individual lover of the arts.

Mallarmé's poetic development may best be illustrated by the citation of representative poems of his successive stages. The best work of his youth is to be found in the poems from his pen printed in the first *Parnasse contemporain*, in which, presentiment of his own unproductivity, he utters a wailing cry of sterility and hopelessness, punctuated, here and there, by a note of sad beauty. Such a note is to be heard in "Soupir":

"Mon âme vers ton front, où rêve, ô calme soeur,
Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur
Et vers le ciel errant de ton œil angélique
Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,
Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!
. . . . Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur
Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie
Et laisse sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie
Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,
Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon."⁴

The foreknowledge of sterility is revealed in "Angoisse":⁵

"Je ne viens pas ce soir vaincre ton corps, ô bête
En qui vont les péchés d'un peuple, ni creuser
Dans tes cheveux impurs une triste tempête
Sous l'incurable ennui que verse mon baiser:

⁴*Poésies*, p. 24.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 33.

Je demande à ton lit le lourd sommeil sans songes
 Planant sous les rideaux inconnus du remords,
 Et que tu peux goûter après tes noirs mensonges,
 Toi qui sur le néant en sais plus que les morts:

Car le Vice, rongéant ma native noblesse,
 M'a comme toi marqué de sa stérilité,
 Mais tandis que ton sein de pierre est habité

Par un cœur que la dent d'aucun crime n'a blessé,
 Je fuis, pâle, défait, hanté par mon linceul,
 Ayant peur de mourir lorsque je couche seul."

Thus far, Mallarmé may be followed with little difficulty. Not for him, however, the easy path of the Parnassian. The tone-dramas of Richard Wagner, whose recognition in 1864 by Ludwig II of Bavaria had marked the end of his long struggle against indifference and outspoken hostility, had enraptured Mallarmé, who saw in them the beacon pointing to a new æsthetics. This new æsthetics was Symbolism, and it began to take more or less definite shape in Mallarmé's brain towards the year 1870. But the clearer grew his conception of the transcendence of poetry into pure music, the slighter became his capacity for embodying it in compositions of breadth and fire. Henceforth, almost everything he wrote was slender or fragmentary in character. For a time, he carried about with him, for example, plans for a drama on the Herodias-theme, but these plans did not progress beyond the two fragments of the "Hérodiade" published in the second *Parnasse contemporain*. With diminishing ability to create went increasing obscurity; by the year 1876, which saw the publication of his most sustained poetic composition, "l'Après-midi d'un faune," now much more widely known in the form of Debussy's epoch-making tone-poem, Mallarmé was well launched on the sea of Symbolism. From now on, the poet's pen produced only a few pages each year; and as though the poems of these later years were not sufficiently obfuscated by verbal vagueness, elliptical mode of expression, and grammatical licenses of every kind, Mallarmé took

the final step and abolished punctuation. The results may be allowed to speak for themselves. Here, for instance, is a sonnet on a red-haired lady (the title is not Mallarmé's but must be inferred by the aid of the imagination; this, of course, is purest Symbolism) :

"La chevelure vol d'une flamme à l'extrême
Occident de désirs pour la tout déployer
Se pose (je dirais mourir un diadème)
Vers le front couronné son ancien foyer

Mais sans or soupirer que cette vive nue
L'ignition du feu toujours intérieur
Originellement la seule continue
Dans le joyau de l'œil véridique ou rieur

Une nudité de héros tendre diffame
Celle qui ne mouvant astre ni feux au doigt
Rien qu'à simplifier avec gloire la femme
Accomplit par son chef fulgurante l'exploit

De semer de rubis le doute qu'elle écorche
Ainsi qu'une joyeuse et tutélaire torche."⁶

Surely Catulle Mendès was justified in calling the author of these fourteen lines an "auteur difficile."⁷ But their musical *timbre* is allied to the grand sweep of the organ in full diapason; and the sonority of the music weaves in and out of a coruscating play of colors, producing the sort of effect one might expect from a simultaneous performance upon the organ and the Clavilux; or, perhaps, from the rendition of the "Liebestod" in a gallery of paintings from the brush of the mystical Gustave Moreau. Listen to this sonnet, hushed by the majesty of death in a bare, silent chamber :

"Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,
L'Angoisse, ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore,
Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix
Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁷Quoted by Arthur Symons, in his highly illuminating essay on Mallarmé in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, Constable, 1911, p. 113).

Sur les crédences, au salon vide; nul ptyx,
Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore
(Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx
Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore).

Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or
Agonise selon peut-être le décor
Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe.

Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
Que dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
De scintillations sitôt le septuor."⁸

The "Tierra del fuego" of Symbolism, Mallarmé's farthest departure from his Parnassian beginnings, is to be found in a strange *plaque* bearing the title: *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.⁹ This poem, printed so as to give the effect of a musical score, is baffling to the best-intentioned commentator. We may, therefore, conclude with the following, by no means translucent, sonnet:

"Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligé à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris,

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile de Cygne."¹⁰

But enough of conundrums! We may now direct our attention to one last, rather unexpected, aspect of Parnassianism, the somewhat incongruous union of contemporaneous Realism with the ideals of Leconte de Lisle, Banville, and Baudelaire.

⁸*Poésies*, p. 128.

⁹First published in the May, 1897, number of a review called *Cosmopolis*. It was issued in book-form in 1914 by the *Nouvelle revue française*.

¹⁰*Poésies*, p. 124.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REALISTS ON PARNASSUS

FRANCOIS COPPÉE

The true significance of *le Parnasse contemporain* for the history of nineteenth-century French poetry has by now been more than adumbrated. The band of poets who collaborated in the formation of the three *Recueils* was, as Catulle Mendès so vigorously asseverated, in no sense a "school"; its multichrome nature calls to mind a Gobelin tapestry, in which strands of such clashing colors as the rigorous impassivity of Heredia and the frenetic self-revelation of Verlaine, the classical paganism of Anatole France and the neo-Romanticism of Albert Glatigny, the metaphysical abstractness of Sully Prudhomme and the capricious epicureanism of Banville, run side by side along woof and warp. Or, to make use of another simile, the Parnassians might be compared to a House of Parliament, with the classicists occupying the Right, the Romanticists the Centre, and the Realists the Left of the chamber. Nor did the various factions always find themselves in complete accord; Leconte de Lisle, for instance, had little sympathy for the popular poetry of the later Coppée and did not hesitate to voice his displeasure.¹ On only one subject did the Parnassians, to a man, agree, namely, on the sacrosanctity of form in the composition of poetry. Whatever theme the poet might be treating, and even if, as we have had occasion to see, the subject-matter were of such total unimportance as to be removed only by the infinitesimal from the mathematical zero, there must be an unrelaxed striving to clothe it in a purity of contour, a symmetry of line, and a harmony of color that should approach, as nearly as was

¹Vide Calmettes: *Leconte de Lisle et ses amis*, pp. 172-80, 182, 186, for the attitude of Leconte de Lisle, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and other Parnassians towards Coppée.

humanly possible, the ideal of perfection. This enslavement to external form was to prove the reef on which the Parnassian bark was dashed to its own destruction; for, on the one hand, poets, writhing within this straitjacket, freed themselves with a wrench and threw themselves furiously into the opposite extreme of formlessness, as represented by the *vers-librists*, and on the other, rebelling against the subordination of matter to manner, they sought to make poetry the handmaiden of philosophy and of science, in a word, of abstract thought. But Parnassianism had served a noble purpose nobly; a poetic Colossus of Rhodes, straddling the nineteenth century from its romanticist beginnings to its symbolist close, it had definitely confirmed the right of poetry to its place in the sun, alongside the other pure arts of music, painting, and sculpture.

One last phase of Parnassianism remains to be considered in this study—that of Realism. Though the leaders of the group, heirs to the Romantic æsthetics, professed a thoroughgoing disdain for what the French would call “actualities” and delved into the lore of antiquity or into the recesses of their own souls for their subject-matter, it was impossible for the rank and file of their disciples to remain unaffected by the powerful realistic wave that had swept the French novel in the persons of Flaubert and the Goncourts, French drama in the dynamic individuality of Dumas fils. The triumph of the industrial Revolution and the concomitant diminution of the leisure class had focussed the attention of thinkers and writers upon the life and the problems of the average man; the ascendancy of science had ushered in an era of statistics and cold facts. Poetry must either descend from the clouds and set firm heel upon a prosaic world or be banished forever from the concerns of men, retaining, like alchemy and astrology, only an academic and historic interest. The efforts made by poets to express the new age in its own terms has culminated in such verse as is to be found in Carl Sandburg’s *Chicago Poems* and *Cornhuskers*. And it is not surprising that there were those among the Parnassians who, while never

yielding in their ambition to achieve formal perfection, followed the lead of the novelists and the playwrights into the generally trivial and oftentimes sorrow-laden lives of the masses of mankind.

The Parnassian whose work most closely approached what might be termed Realism was, unquestionably, François Coppée. He was not, however, by any manner of means alone in the group. Touches of realism are, for example, abundant in the work of the two poets Albert Mérat (1840-1909) and Léon Valade (1841-1883) who were so intimate that their friends, in jest, frequently interchanged their given names, and whose first volume of verse, *Avril, Mai, Juin* (1863) was the result of collaboration. Both poets are represented in each of the three collections of *le Parnasse contemporain*, and their contributions are water-marked with that high polish which was the *sine qua non* for admission into the *Recueils*. Their specialty was the etching of charmingly familiar scenes and out-of-the-way corners of Paris, and, more particularly in the case of Mérat, of the Parisian *banlieue*. One might also mention André Lemoyne and André Theuriet (1833-1907), the latter better known as novelist than as poet, whose verse is impregnated with a love of the countryside and a keen observation of the joys and sorrows of the peasant and the villager, who are, it must be confessed, usually over-idealized after the manner of George Sand. At least passing notice, too, must be taken of Armand Renaud (1836-1894), who contributed to the second *Parnasse contemporain* a "Fiancées de Cayenne" and to the third a "Pauvre petite malade," both of which were later printed in a volume bearing the significant title of *Drames du peuple* (1885). The drama of the people, given a tremendous impetus by the sociological novels of that champion of the downtrodden, Zola, was to loom larger and larger in poetry, as witness the work of a Francis Jammes and a Robert Frost.

Even before the appearance, however, of *l'Assommoir* and *Germinal*, a French poet was to paint the sufferings and the heroic struggles of the toiler and was thereby to earn

the sobriquet of "le poète des humbles." This poet was François Coppée, a Parisian of Paris, who knew and loved his native city as thoroughly as did Anatole France. Born in 1842, of a family which, on the paternal side, was of Walloon origin, Coppée was of definitely *bourgeois* stock and inherited its weaknesses as well its virtues. His father was a highly respectable clerk in the Ministry of War whose meagre salary barely sufficed for the needs of the household, so that François, after a few years of schooling, was compelled to hire out as architect's apprentice and, in addition, to do copying in order to bolster up the family income; his, thus, was a first-hand acquaintance with hardship. At the age of twenty, he was left, by the death of his father, the sole bread-winner of the family; through the influence of friends, he obtained a position in the governmental bureau in which his father had been employed. Despite a comparatively frail constitution, Coppée showed himself possessed of rare fortitude by devoting his evenings to the continuation of his so rudely interrupted education and to the composition of rather juvenile verse, some of which was published in Paris reviews and attracted the attention of Catulle Mendès, ever ready to lend the helping hand to impecunious but promising poets. According to his own somewhat elaborate account, which must undoubtedly be taken *cum grano salis*, Mendès took Coppée in hand and asked to be shown all his youthful compositions, some six thousand verses in all. These he perused carefully and then advised the young poet to consign to the fire. This Coppée did, whereupon Mendès, certain that the spark of genius was smoldering in his breast, set about fanning it into a flame by a rigid course of instruction in the technique of poetry.² Whether or not this tale be true, we do know that Mendès invited Coppée, in 1863, to join his little *cénacle*, and later introduced him into the *salons* of Mme. de Ricard, Leconte de Lisle, and Banville. Coppée contributed a group of poems to the *Parnasse contemporain* of

²Vide Mendès: *la Légende du Parnasse contemporain*, pp. 205-17.

1866, and in the following year Lemerre brought out his first volume of verse, *le Reliquaire*, which was dedicated to Leconte de Lisle. This collection and *Intimités* (1868), though they attracted little public attention, were very favorably received by the Parnassians. Coppée seemed destined to live out his life as an obscure government clerk, whose leisure would be spent writing verse not unlike, though perhaps superior to, that of the minor poets of the Parnassian group. A better fate, however, was reserved for him. A one-act curtain-raiser in titillatingly emotional verse, *le Passant*, was accepted for production by the Odéon, and the two characters who made up its entire *dramatis personæ* were superbly acted by Mme. Agar and Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt, whose preformance of the rôle of Zanetto, the young poet-musician roving Italy in search of high adventure, revealed her as a new star in the French histrionic firmament. *Le Passant* played to a long succession of delighted audiences, and critics were generous in their praise. In this same year, 1869, Coppée left the Ministry of War to accept the post of assistant-librarian in the Senate, a position which he relinquished in 1872, upon the express condition that it be offered to Leconte de Lisle, then in straitened circumstances. For a few years he served as archivist of the Comédie-française, but his connection with that celebrated theatre was terminated by the refusal of its play-committee to accept one of his dramas for reading. All this time, his pen had functioned uninterruptedly; each successive year saw the publication of volumes of verse, sketches and short-stories, plays, and even literary criticism. Not many were surprised, therefore, when, in 1884, Coppée was elected to the French Academy to succeed the poet Victor de Laprade. Henceforth, he devoted himself to his multifarious literary activities, from which he emerged, on the occasion of the abominable Affaire Dreyfus to throw himself wholeheartedly, if wrong-headedly, on the side of the anti-revisionists. A long and serious illness in 1897 produced upon Coppée an effect analogous to that of his sixteen months in prison upon Verlaine; the writings of his last ten years smell rather sulphorously of the taper and the

consecrated wafer. Coppée's *mea culpa*, a thoroughly ineffective counterpart to Verlaine's *Sagesse*, is to be found in the verse-collection entitled *Dans la prière et dans la lutte*. It was in the odor of sanctity and "muni de tous les sacrements de l'église" that Coppée died, in 1908, in the heart of that Paris which he had so infrequently abandoned during the three score and six years of his earthly existence.

The career of François Coppée offers a very striking example of the dangers which beset the path of the poet who would also be a preacher—regardless of the special doctrine he may be preaching. True it assuredly is that art for its own sake, when carried to its logical extreme and completely dissociated from life, is, more often than not, either nonsensical or, at best, tiresome. Art must be, at the very least, the companion of life—either as it actually is or as the creative artist visions it. But the handmaiden of life, or of any specific philosophy of life, it can rarely afford to become. Art with a social, moral, or utilitarian purpose, it has been often enough demonstrated, is more than likely to lose complete sight of itself in its eagerness to advance its purpose. The advertisements in the American periodicals which boast of a circulation of millions are often speciously artistic, but only the paradoxically-minded would venture to set them beside genuine, enduring art. Insofar, then, as Coppée remained true to the Parnassian ideal, he had the makings of a poet of merit; as soon as he betrayed this ideal, his poetry began to degenerate into fanatical mouthing. Reared in a pious, conservative family, he was impatient, as a young man, with the *bourgeois* virtues—exaggerated patriotism, slavish reverence to Mother Church, insistence upon the necessity of family solidarity—he had there imbibed. Unquestionably, the influence of Mendès and his Parnassian colleagues was for much in this weakening of faith. His early poetry, although it never waxed blasphemous, was decidedly skeptical in tone, wherever it ventured into the domain of religion; for the most part, it avoided such dangerous ground and confined itself

to the usual Parnassian themes. Coppée here displayed excellent craftsmanship, and might, had he remained faithful to his art, have succeeded in scaling the heights of Parnassus. Unfortunately, skilled artisan that he was, Coppée was endowed with a very exiguous imagination and a limited mind. His reaction to the defeat of 1871 was that of the veriest chauvinist, and his conduct in the Affaire Dreyfus takes rank with that of the schoolboys who filled the Paris streets with cries of "Mort aux Juifs!" The poetry of his declining years is steeped in fanatical mysticism, religious bigotry, and the spirit of *revanche*. If Coppée is considered at all in this study, it is solely because he was a man of real poetic potentialities who helped introduce a new strain into contemporary French poetry and whose failure because of political and religious bias constitute an example of the ineffectiveness of Parnassianism whenever it entered into the arena of life.

Like Verlaine, then, Coppée first trod the poetic stage as a Parnassian. His maiden volume, *le Reliquaire*, though it is dedicated to "mon cher maître, Leconte de Lisle," is redolent of a rather diluted Baudelaireanism. The poet is weighed down by a "spleen détesté,"³ by a vague skepticism, by a snobbishness which causes the youth who was so soon to become the "poète des humbles" to speak of himself as "moi qui hais et qui fuis les foules turbulentes."⁴ At twenty-four, he is already a "libertin repentant" and seeks "redemption" in the love of an unsullied virgin.⁵ Now and again, however, he strikes a note of simple sincerity which bespeaks high lyric endowment. Read, for example, "la Trêve":⁶

"La fatigue nous désenlace.
Reste ainsi, migonne. Je veux
Voir reposer ta tête lasse
Sur l'or épars de tes cheveux.

³Vide "Vers le passé" (*le Reliquaire—Œuvres*, Paris, Lemerre, n.d., vol. I, p. 7.)

⁴Vide "Adagio," *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵"Redemption," *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 21.

Tais-toi. Ce que tu pourrais dire
 Sur le bonheur que je ressens
 Jamais ne vaudrait ce sourire
 Chargé d'aveux reconnaissants.

Sous tes paupières abaissées
 Cherche plutôt à retenir
 Pour en parfumer tes pensées,
 L'extase qui vient de finir.

Et pendant ton doux rêve, amie,
 Accoudé parmi les coussins;
 Je regarderai l'accalmie
 Vaincre l'orage de tes seins."

This note of delicate, if illicit, love is developed in Coppée's second volume, *Intimités*, some of the poems of which easily take rank among the very best of their author's work. Occasionally the verse is tremulous with the emotion of a Musset; the poet is clearly divorcing himself from the objectivity of his master, Leconte de Lisle. The awaited arrival of the beloved, the room which serves as trysting-place, the passionate embrace and the delicious lassitude ensuing, these and other aspects of the same subject are treated effectively, though discreetly, in flawlessly musical alexandrines. Here is a poem somewhat reminiscent of the parting of Romeo and Juliet at dawn:

"La plus lente caresse, amie, est la meilleure,
 N'est-ce pas? Et tu hais l'instant funeste où l'heure
 Rapelle avec son chant métallique et glacé
 Qu'il se fait tard, très tard, et qu'il est dépassé
 Déjà, le temps moral d'un bain ou d'une messe,
 Car ce sont les adieux alors et la promesse
 De revenir. . . . Et puis nous oublions encor!
 Mais l'horloge implacable avec son timbre d'or
 Recommence. Tu veux te sauver; tu te troubles.
 Hélas! et nous devons mettre les baisers doubles."

This vein, however, was soon exhausted, and Coppée began to look into the world about him for new subject-matter. In one of the *Intimités*, he calls himself "un pâle

⁴*Intimités* (*Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 103-104).

enfant du vieux Paris";⁸ and in ever increasing measure, the poet now finds himself observing the life of the capital, prying into the nooks and crannies of its slums, its *fau-bourgs* where dwell the laborers of its vast industrial system, and transcribing their joys and their sufferings. Completely freeing himself from the remote concerns of Leconte de Lisle and his followers, Coppée began to emulate the novelists and playwrights of the day by delving into the busy, often sordid, life about him for his themes. The very titles of his next verse-collections are significant; one is called *les Poèmes modernes* (1869), another *les Humbles* (1872); a dramatic monologue, which had the good fortune to be recited publicly by that master of French tragic actors, Mounet-Sully, is entitled "la Grève des forgerons." The question at once arises as to the use Coppée made of this highly realistic subject-matter and the success or failure which attended his efforts to graft the Parnassian attitude upon the recital of the details of the daily life of the proletariat.

The notion that one of the functions, at least, of the poet is to serve as interpreter to the more fortunate of the suffering that is ubiquitous in the lives of the masses was, of course, by no means new with Coppée. The first French poet to put the theory into serious and sustained practice was Eugène Manuel, a contemporary of Coppée, whose work will be considered in the pages that are to follow. But as early as 1829, Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme* had paid homage to the humble citizen and Victor Hugo had sounded the note in a poem entitled "Pour les pauvres";⁹ and in his play, *Gringoire*, Banville, the lawgiver of the Parnassians, makes his hero define his rôle in these words: "Ce qui fait le poète, le voici: tous ces pleurs inconnus, toutes ces plaintes si faibles, tous ces sanglots qu'on ne pouvait pas entendre passent dans sa voix, se mêlent à son chant."¹⁰ Three quarters of a century before, Wordsworth had thrown wide the doors of English literature to the poetry

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹Vide *Feuilles d'automne* (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp. 375-378).

¹⁰Vide edition of Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1921, p. 77.

that is to be gleaned from the lives of the common people. In poems like "Michael," "Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman," and "Lucy Gray, or Solitude," the great "Lakiste" had given concrete form to his desire to write of "simple subjects for simple people in simple language." The pitfall in this type of poetry is the temptation to write of too simple subjects in language so simple as frequently to sound ludicrous. Wordsworth's tendency to inject into his poems totally unnecessary and uninspiring minor details phrased in verses which rhyme almost like Mother Goose jingles is a commonplace with students of English poetry. Lines like the following are not uncommon in Wordsworth:

"I met a little cottage girl,
She was eight years old, she said,"¹¹

or again:

"They followed from the snowy bank
Those footmarks, one by one,
Into the middle of the plank;
And further there were none."¹²

Moreover, the English poet, whose knowledge of the misery of the submerged tenth was, after all, obtained only at second hand, was prone to over-sentimentalize on the theme and to idealize his "poor people." It remained for the proletarian writers of our own day, for novelists like Pierre Hamp in France, to depict the life of the masses without the tears of the moralist and the humanitarian.

Though Coppée was reared in a *milieu* of "petites gens," he, too, was not free of the faults just noted in Wordsworth. The poems which make up the collection, *les Humbles*, are largely actuated by pity, so that the picture tends to be distorted, one-sided. In "Emigrants," the poet declares:

"Oh! comme je les plains, les humbles, les petits,
Tous ceux-là qui sont nés et qui vivent blottis
Timidement autour d'un clocher de village,"¹³

¹¹From "We Are Seven."

¹²From "Lucy Gray."

¹³"Emigrants" (*Les Humbles—Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 52).

which puts one in mind of Gray's "Elegy." The themes treated in *les Humbles* are all that the title implies. There is the wet-nurse whose drunken husband permits their infant to die while she hires out to the wealthy society-lady; there are the green-grocer ("C'était un tout petit épicier de Montrouge"),¹⁴ the talented son who slaves as clerk by day and cabaret violinist at night in order to support his mother, the simple music-teacher, the carpenter and his family, "petits bourgeois" and "émigrants." The *Poèmes modernes* include a poem on foundling children, another on the drunkard who beats his wife regularly until a child is born to bring a measure of peace into the family, a third on a woman of the people watching a military parade with her excited child. "La Grève des forgerons" is the recital, before a court of justice, of a blacksmith who has killed one of his fellow-workmen, during a strike, because the latter had refused him permission to return to work in order to save his family from starvation. Somewhat less gloomy in color are the *Promenades et intérieurs* (1872), a series of etchings of Paris and its *banlieue*, of which the poet says:

"C'est vrai, j'aime Paris d'une amitié malsaine"¹⁵

and

"J'adore la banlieue avec ses champs en friche."¹⁵

Structurally, all these poems are compact; stylistically, they are vigorous rather than beautiful; metrically, they are, as one would expect of a Parnassian, highly finished. The commonplaceness of both subject-matter and treatment, however, robs them of any claim to rank beside the work of the great lyricists.

There are other phases of Coppée's poetic striving, but none of them merit more than passing attention. Much of his energy, for example, was expended upon the composition of narrative poetry. He produced a large number of verse-tales on a wide range of subjects—from a series of

¹⁴"Le Petit épicier," *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵*Promenades et intérieurs* (*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 103).

Récits épiques (1888), which would seem to have been inspired by the *Légende des siècles*, to a lengthly fiction on the life of a poet, Olivier, who is not unreminiscent of Musset's Rolla. Now it is a Christmas story he is telling, now it is the heroic adventure of the communistic railway engineer who, contrary to his theories, gave his own life that the capitalistic passengers might be saved from destruction. And always the poet falls short of greatness. Where he is not definitely derivative, he is mawkish or he is hyper-moral. Especially is the latter true of his religious and his patriotic poetry. It is all so prosaic, that one is tempted to ask oneself why he continued writing in verse after his original Parnassian vein had paid out. Coppée was himself well enough aware of the fact that he had lost the respect of his former colleagues by his betrayal of his art; he admits as much in "le Devoir nouveau," the poem which opens the series of public breast-beatings and *peccavis* comprising *Dans la prière et dans la lutte*¹⁶ (1900). The point was, of course, that Coppée had refused to understand that mere skill at versification does not make a great poet, had failed to realize how sadly he lacked the opulent imagination of Leconte de Lisle, the magic spontaneity of Banville, the cauterizing originality of Baudelaire. In the face of such poetry as Coppée's, it was small wonder that the Symbolists announced the death of Parnassianism and joyously proceeded to the obsequies.

EUGENE MANUEL

In the light of the adverse judgments which have just been passed on the work of Coppée, it might seem supererogatory to devote any further space to poets of that ilk. The fact remains, however, that Coppée was typical of a tendency in French poetry which, while at the time unproductive of any truly great artistic achievements, marks a definite stage in the history of æsthetics and, as such, can not be overlooked. It is the merest coincidence that *les Humbles* appeared in the very year of the death of

¹⁶*Œuvres*, vol. VI, p. 3 et seq.

Théophile Gautier; some significance, nevertheless, resides in this coincidence. In the two-score years since the glorious days of "mil huit cent trente," France had experienced two revolutions, a catastrophic war, and a communistic uprising, in the course of all of which the form of government had grown progressively more liberal, and there were those who foresaw the millenium. In such stirring times, the duty of all good men and true was, manifestly, to strive for the creation of the world-utopia, in which poverty and suffering should be unknown and fraternal love should reign supreme. Thus, at least, maintained the humanitarians, the utilitarians, nothing daunted by the disappointment of the numerous Continental revolutions of 1848 and by the scores of new evils which broke out like festering sores on the body of mankind as a result of the rapid industrialization of society. All forces must be harnessed to bring about, as quickly as possible, the desired end. Art, as a potent emotional force, must not be exempted from service, but, allying itself with the researches of science, must set itself the task of painting life in all its hideousness, so that men's eyes might be opened and their energies directed to the amelioration of wrongs and the beautification of existence. Hence, Zola and his "experimental novel," hypothetically the offspring of Claude Bernard's "experimental medicine"; hence, the drama of Henri Becque and Antoine's "Théâtre libre," with their emphasis upon the "slice of life" and the "comédie rosse"; and hence, Coppée's poetic apotheosis of "les petites gens." A far cry was all this from Gautier's conception of "l'art pour l'art," the theory which became the device of the Parnassians and which Coppée, turning his back upon his poetic forbears, so completely abandoned. Perhaps it was just as well that Gautier died before the publication of the third *Parnasse contemporain*, which strayed so far from the narrow path trod by the ambitious poets of the 1866 *Recueil*.

But Realism had entered the portals of art with the avowed intention of establishing itself as the master in the house. The Realists were the artistic spokesmen of the new age of science, of industry, of steel and of statistics.

This new age spoke almost exclusively in prose, when it did not use mathematical ciphers as its medium of communication; only rarely did it have recourse to verse. Poetry found itself relegated to groups of the esoterically minded, who squabbled among themselves as to the functions and technics of art and were blissfully ignored by the masses of men. In the quarter-century just passed, poetry has been beaten from pillar to post, tossed as in a blanket by schools and coteries and cliques, and is still somewhat hopelessly floundering in a morass of uncertainty. There are those who maintain that the poet has at last succeeded in adjusting himself to the changed conditions and that a new day has dawned; the less optimistic shudderingly aver that poetry is fast becoming a lost art. Whatever be the truth of the matter—and it would be worse than futile to prophecy—it is certain that we must look for the beginnings of such significant present-day achievements as *The Spoon River Anthology* and *North of Boston* in the pseudo-realistic verse of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Herein lies the justification for any extended treatment of the work of Coppée; on the same grounds the student of the history of French lyric poetry can not pass in complete silence the efforts of a contemporary of Coppée who enjoyed an hour of prestige, Eugène Manuel (1823–1901).

The points of resemblance between Coppée and Manuel are many and striking. Both were born into very respectable middle-class families, Manuel having been the son of a Jewish physician;¹ both were reared and spent the better part of their lives in Paris; both filled governmental posts, Manuel, after a brilliant career as student and as professor in *lycées* at Tours, Dijon, and Paris, entering the department of Public Instruction in 1870 and rising, eight years later, to the post of Inspector-General. As poets, both men specialized in themes drawn from the life of the masses; and both were rendered vocal by the Franco-Prussian War to a pitch that often approached rasping shrillness and that

¹For the Jewish note in Manuel's poetry, vide the present writer's article on the subject in *The Reflex* for December, 1928.

in Manuel, who undoubtedly had German Jewish blood in his veins, sounds a trifle suspicious. But whereas Coppée began, at least, in the Parnassian love of art for its own sake, Manuel, though he is represented in the second and in the third *Parnasse contemporain*, was throughout his career incurably moralistic; so that, skillful versifier though he undoubtedly was, his work attains to something approaching greatness only on the few occasions when he escapes momentarily from his didactic straitjacket.

By way of approach to the poetry of Manuel, let us listen to the poet himself on his relation to his work. In the preface to the 1899 edition of his *Poésies complètes*,² he says: "Ni le vieux fonds d'éducation classique et universitaire, avec les impérissables modèles que j'ai si longtemps commentés; ni les théories du romantisme triomphant, dont mes vingt ans saluaient la victoire; ni les utiles retours de l'école du bon sens; ni les fières et rigides beautés du Parnasse, d'un éclat si décoratif; ni les nouvelles et dernières tentatives de réforme, bien propres à déconcerter l'oreille, et même un peu la raison; rien n'a compté pour moi, rien n'a pesé sur moi, au prix de la sincérité du sentiment, qui me dicta mes premiers vers et m'inspira tous les autres." Thus, though some of the poems contained in Manuel's first collection, *Pages intimes* (1866), date from as early as 1848, and most of them were written during the formative years of the *Parnasse*, Manuel was never a member of any of the Parnassian groups. The *Pages intimes* ring the changes on the beauties of domestic life (there is never anywhere in Manuel the remotest hint of promiscuous love); in a refreshing variety of metrical and stanzaic forms, the poet sings of the peaceful, rather austere, home of his parents, now and then saddened by the death of a patriarchal relative, and of the calm joys springing from the companionship of a helpful and appreciative wife. Always he is animated by the love of the true and the beautiful, the noble and the just. "Le vrai fut mon souci, le beau fut mon

² 2 vols., Paris, Calmann-Levy (vol. I, p. X).

idole,"³ he exclaims in a line that might well have served him as motto. If, like Solomon, he had been granted the choice of a gift from God, he would have asked, not for the knowledge of the sage, the genius of the artist, but for the gift of speech that might have enabled him to hold the entire world in rapt attention at his feet, and then: "Je parlerais vertu, justice, et liberté."⁴ This apostolic fervor in the cause of the right is coupled with an unwavering belief in God and in the immortality of the soul of man. Manuel's religion, though it bore an unmistakably Hebraic cast, had nothing of the sanguine militancy of the later Coppée; rather did it envisage, with Isaiah, that day when swords would be beaten into ploughshares and when man would live at unbroken peace with man. For all his unbending idealism, however, Manuel was by no means blind to the suffering that is humanity's heritage on earth. Especially is he puzzled by the phenomenon of untimely death—that of the infant or of the young man in the full bloom of his adolescent vigor. His feelings on this subject are summed up in an excellent sonnet, "la Note qui pleure":⁵

"Vous me grondez, amis, de tant parler des morts.
Ma voix, de jour en jour, traîne plus monotone:
Tels, quand l'arbre a senti les rafales d'automne,
Les rameaux dépouillés ont de plus sourds accords.

J'en parle encor trop peu: c'est le seul de mes torts!
Si je songeais à ceux dont le départ m'étonne,
Combien je maudirais ma gaîté qui détonne!
Le rire, à peine éteint, me laisse son remords,

Ma main, sur le clavier qu'elle anime à son heure,
Retombe chaque fois sur la note qui pleure,
Et module alentour des chants plus sérieux:

Tandis que la pédale, obstinément, pressée,
Prolonge cette note en sons mystérieux,
Ainsi qu'un glas funèbre, écho de ma pensée."

³"Alma Mater" (*Poésies complètes*, vol. I, p. 66).

⁴"Logos," *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵*Pages intimes*, pp. 146-47; also to be found in the third *Parnasse contemporain*.

This delicate, rather too lily-white, poetry of domestic contentment and lofty resignation sounds strangely out of tune in the concert of the Banvilles and the Baudelaires, the Verlaines and the Leconte de Lisles who trod, simultaneously with Manuel, the streets of Paris without in the least influencing him. With the passing of the years, Manuel began more and more to examine the "best of all possible worlds" in which he lived and to be grieved by the many fetid sores discoverable on its crust. Without for a moment losing faith in an ever-just God, he set himself the task of exposing these wounds so as to arouse the pity of the more fortunate and fill them with remorse for their callous indifference. Society, not God, he believed, was to blame for the precarious state of the lower classes, and society must be rudely awakened by the clarion call of justice. It is, perhaps, Manuel's chief claim to importance that he was the first to draw largely upon the life of the humble for his subject-matter; for his one-act drama, *les Ouvriers*, was performed in 1870, and his verse-collection, *Poèmes populaires*, was published in 1871, a year before the appearance of *les Humbles*. Indeed, the date of publication for the *Poèmes populaires* had been set for the previous year but had had, upon the outbreak of the war, to be delayed; and some of its poems were written as early as 1852, when Coppée was but a child of ten. That the two men were friends is evidenced by the dedication of "Fleurs d'orange," a poem describing the feelings of a prostitute as she longingly gazes at a bridal wreath in a florist's window, "à mon ami François Coppée."⁶ Certain it is that the themes of the *Poèmes populaires* and of *les Humbles* offer more than casual resemblance. Coppée's poem on the drunkard who is sobered by the sight of the infant born to his wife while he has been carousing in the saloon is matched, in Manuel, by one on a bullying husband whose wife is about to leave him but is reconciled when she notices

⁶Vide the author's "Comparison of the Poetry of François Coppée and Eugène Manuel" (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, December, 1928).

him weeping over the long-forgotten garment of their dead child. Manuel's picture-gallery includes the blind flageolet-player, begging on one of the bridges over the Seine, the emaciated child asking for alms in the fashionable Bois de Boulogne and singing to keep up her spirits, the working-man's sweetheart who dies of cold and hunger, the old clown who meets death on the roadside while his colleagues in the wretched company of strolling actors look helplessly on, the libidinous artist's-model, the invalid child in the free ward of a hospital, the young girl employed in the spinning-factory who works although she is far gone with child, two drunken sailors one of whom kills the other in a brawl whereupon the first drowns himself, the harlot prowling the streets at dead of night, the child-mother, and so on, almost *ad infinitum*. In a word, as Coppée has been called "le poète des humbles," so might Manuel be styled "the poet of the slums," of the "bas-fonds" of Parisian life. Herein might be said to lie the difference between the two poets and the superiority, such as it is, of Coppée over Manuel. Coppée's pictures are not so unrelievedly drab, nor his intention, at least before his conversion, so manifestly reformatory as are those of Manuel. The one shows us the laborer on his Sunday outing, with family or sweetheart, the "midinette" gayly hugging the arm of her lover as they push through the throng at a street-circus; the other rarely permits the gleam of joyous youth to enliven his painting. Coppée, though by no means free of sentimentality and didacticism, has in him, at this stage of his career, something of the disinterested observer; Manuel is the uplifter, the vice-crusader who would thrust his reforms upon a people that would perhaps prefer being left alone. And regardless of the wisdom of his efforts, Manuel's art must needs suffer in the heat of his fury. Like Zola and most of his Médan confreres, Manuel lost his equilibrium in attempting to ride the horses of poetry and sociology simultaneously. The stuff that goes into the annual report of the superintendent of an eleemosynary institution or of a philanthropic organization can only with the greatest difficulty be set to verse; and, in the end, such verse is not

likely to be dignified with the name of artistic poetry. The true artist can rarely afford to lose his temper; in order to achieve a balanced, harmonious whole, undistorted by any kind of special pleading, by any *arrière-pensée* borrowed from the socialistic parson or the agent of the unions, he must view life, as Spinoza so memorably put it, "sub specie æternitatis." Perhaps it is due Manuel to say that, if he fell short of great art, it was because of excessive zeal in a noble cause; and, in any case, he can not be robbed of the credit of having been among the first poets to realize what a vast wealth of subject-matter is to be found in the comings and goings, the life and death of that mighty proletariat which is ever more loudly asserting its right to an equal share in the blessings of mundane existence.

CHAPTER NINE

SYMBOLISTS AND DECADENTS

The third *Parnasse contemporain*, it was earlier pointed out, was published in 1876 and was an anthology of contemporary French verse rather than the poetic exemplification of the theories and practices of a single group of writers. As a matter of fact, the Parnassian edifice had, for at least five years, been showing evident signs of decay. The decade from 1860 to 1870 may properly be styled the era of Parnassian supremacy in French lyric poetry; the Franco-Prussian War, though it would not seem to have been the direct cause of its downfall, undoubtedly, by its re-awakening of the mystical spirit in the younger generation of French writers and thinkers, disillusioned in their hopes for imperial glory for their nation, was a contributing factor. The Parnassians—and more especially the masters, Leconte de Lisle and Banville—by their exaction from their followers of a rigid adherence to objectivity and technical precision, had laid themselves open, in common with the Realists and Naturalists, to the accusation of over-emphasis of the physical, phenomenal world as opposed to the vast inner, subconscious realm of thought and dreams. The disaster of 1871 had driven home the conviction that material prosperity and national grandeur were but mere tinsel, the outer trappings of a body devoid of soul. Men's minds turned inward, their imaginations set about illuminating the shadowy recesses of the self; the external world was accepted as a necessary evil and considered worthy of treatment in literature only when interpreted in terms of the individual. Introspection, subjectivity again became the style; and with them came those literary movements which, in the broadest sense, are inclusively termed Symbolism.

If the decade from 1860 to 1870 may be considered the heyday of Parnassian ascendancy, the following decade may well be called the period of its atrophy. By 1880, exactly

a half-century after the triumphant fanfares of *Hernani* and the July Revolution, something better than a quarter of a century since the enthronement of Realism and the revolution of 1848, the stage was set for a third important literary revolt, one which, it has just been intimated, may be looked upon as an indirect resultant of the national cataclysm of 1870-1871. Revolutions, however, sudden and swift as they may seem in their occurrence, rarely happen overnight. They are born in a discontent manifesting itself at first in faint, distant rumblings which gradually come nearer and grow louder until they burst into the thunder-clap that releases the torrent of pent-up dissatisfaction and sweeps away the old to let in the new. The new, none the less, retains many of the features of the old and in some respects is undistinguishable from it. All this is precisely true of the reaction from Parnassianism which we may, for our immediate purposes, style generically as Symbolism. The Symbolists themselves deified as their trinity three poets representing three distinct movements of nineteenth-century France: the Romanticist, Gérard de Nerval, the Parnassian, Baudelaire, and the modernist, Arthur Rimbaud. Arthur Symonds, one of the leading exponents of Symbolist theory and practice in England, devotes the first chapter of his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to Gérard de Nerval. This ill-fated poet was the man who first introduced Gautier to Victor Hugo, and he served as one of the officers in the boisterous *Hernani* campaign. He was a soul apart—a dweller in the realm of fancy and imagination, a lonely traveler who brought back from Germany and the Orient a nostalgic mysticism which was gradually to gain complete control of his mind and ended by sapping his mental powers. The translator of Goethe's *Faust*,¹ the exquisite *raconteur* of *Sylvie* and the other *Filles du feu* (1854), the delicate poet of *les Chimères*² and *les Cydalises*,²

¹Part One was published in 1828, Part Two, together with selected ballads by Goethe, Schiller, Bürger, Uhland, and other German poets, in 1840.

²Assembled and published in one volume by the *Mercur de France* in 1897.

who was found, early one cold morning in 1855 hanging from a shutter of a dilapidated house in one of the streets of old Paris, prematurely dead at the age of forty-seven, revealed in his work numerous characteristics which were to become part and parcel of the Symbolist heritage and were to be handed on to many of the poets writing in the France of today. The following sonnet, "Artémis," for example, is, to say the least, prognosticatory of Mallarmé and his disciples:

"La Treizième revient—c'est encor la première;
Et c'est toujours la seule,—ou c'est le seul moment:
Car es-tu reine, ô toi! la première ou dernière?
Es-tu roi, toi le seul ou le dernier amant?"

Aimez qui vous aime du berceau dans la bière;
Celle que j'aimais seul m'aime encor tendrement:
C'est la mort—ou la morte— O délice! ô tourment!
La rose qu'elle tient, c'est la Rose trémière.

Sainte napolitaine aux mains pleines de feux,
Rose au cœur violet, fleur de sainte Gudule:
As-tu trouvé ta croix dans le désert des cieux?

Roses blanches, tombez! vous insultez nos dieux;
Tombez, fantômes blancs de votre ciel qui brûle;
.... La sainte de l'abîme est plus sainte à mes yeux."³

Two years after the death of the author of *les Chimères*, Baudelaire hurled into the midst of his shocked contemporaries his burning brand of "flowers of evil." A Parnassian in his attitude towards his art and in his technical perfection, Baudelaire was, notwithstanding, something of an interloper in the Parnassian camp. This fact was divined by some of the younger members of the group—notably Léon Cladel, Verlaine, and Mallarmé—who were not slow in throwing off the yoke of allegiance to the parent body and to turn aside into the trail that had already been blazed by Gérard de Nerval and Baudelaire. It is a point

³From *les Chimères* (vide *Œuvres choisies de Gérard de Nerval*, Paris, Larousse, n.d., p. 225).

which can hardly be stressed too often that the Symbolists, genetically, were, thus, the direct offsprings of the Parnassians and that Verlaine and Mallarmé, the prophets of their two principal groups, began as Parnassians. All that remained to crystallize the hitherto vaporous yearnings for a new poetic millenium was a galvanization resulting from some startling prosodic phenomenon. When, therefore, Verlaine, in 1886, published the *Illuminations* of Rimbaud, the young poets, almost with one accord leaped to their feet and hailed the Messiah with clamorous hosannahs. And even Rimbaud, we have seen, would have liked at the outset of his career, to be enrolled in the ranks of the Parnassians.

The end of the Parnassian era, thus, overlapped the beginnings of Symbolism, strictly so called, in France. It has been shown already that though the Parnassians considered themselves the disciples of Hugo and Gautier and liked to be known as neo-Romantics, their æsthetics actually constituted a revolt against Romanticism. The Symbolist rebellion, on the other hand, although it was essentially a forward-looking movement,⁴ represents, in several important respects, a return to Romanticism. Someone has defined Symbolism as "le dernier coup de queue du romantisme expirant."⁵ A living protest against the materialistic *scientisme* and the cold-blooded objectivity of the literature of the age, the Symbolists revived many of the Romantic attitudes. From the point of view of technique, they made much of the Romantic doctrine of absolute freedom of inspiration, unshackled by rules and precedents; ergo, their apparent negligence of poetic form which culminated in *vers libre*. As for treatment, they were inclined to the subjectivity, the naïveté, the mysticism which often degenerated into mere spiritualism, the religious fervor of

⁴"Le symbolisme," says A. Poizat in his book of that name (Paris, *la Renaissance du livre*, 1919) "fut en effet une violente réaction contre tout ce qui l'avait précédé," p. 136).

⁵Quoted by E. Raynaud: *la Mêlée symboliste* (3 vols., Paris, *la Renaissance du livre*, 1920—vol. III, p. 154).

the Lamartinians and, more especially, of the Arnim-Brentano wing of German Romanticism. For subject-matter, they followed the Romantics back to the Middle Ages and still further into the various aspects of primitive civilizations, into the microcosm of the human soul and the personality of the individual, into the dream-world of the poet's imagination. At the same time, they kept their eyes on the phenomenal world, and recorded its pulse-beats and its systolic murmurs. Broadly speaking, then, the Symbolists attempted to reproduce the sensuous and the spiritual worlds in a prosodic mould sufficiently fluid to allow of the rendition of reactions, impressions, and moods by the liberal use of word-symbols. Or, to permit one of the guild to speak for himself: "Les Formes esthétiques du poème sont des symboles. Le Symbole étant défini: une figure, une image, qui exprime une chose purement morale. Le poème destiné à produire une émotion esthétique est celui qui, évoquant par le vers des formes esthétiques logiquement reliées entre elles dans l'unité d'un sujet de composition, a pour objet la réalisation du Beau."⁶

We must hasten to add, however, that it is as dangerous to speak of the Symbolists as though they were one homogeneous body as it is similarly to regard the Parnassians. Strictly, there were two original bodies, known as the Decadents and the Symbolists, respectively. The parent trunks, however, were not slow in giving off almost innumerable limbs, boughs, and twigs, each of which assumed a separate name, frequently grotesque both in sound and in meaning, issued a high-flown manifesto, and published a review which, in most instances, proved hardly even ephemeral. To mention but a few of these groups:⁷ there were, among many others, *l'Intégralisme*, *le Dynamisme*, *le Simultanéisme*, *l'Intenséisme*, *le Vivantisme*, *le Philopréstantéisme*,

⁶Last sentences of a statement of his æsthetics made by Edouard Dubus of the Decadent group to Raynaud (*op. cit.*, vol I, pp. 115-17).

⁷For a complete catalogue and description of these seemingly countless "ismes," vide Florian-Parmentier: *Histoire contemporaine des Lettres françaises* (Paris, Figuière, n.d.). No less than sixty groups are here enumerated and their principles analyzed.

l'Unanimisme of Jules Romains, and the boisterous *Futurisme* of the Italian, F. T. Marinetti. Among the more important reviews published by one or another of these so-called "schools" were *le Scapin*, founded in 1885, with a manifesto entitled "la Décadence" in the eighteenth issue; *la Vogue*, which began a checkered career in 1886 and, under the editorship of Gustave Kahn, played a significant rôle in the fray; *le Chat noir*, Pierre Louys' *la Conque*, *la Phalange*, *la Plume*, *les Cahiers de la quinzaine*, *la Nouvelle revue française*, and *le Mercure de France*, which last two have risen to a position of enviable prominence among French periodical publications of today. And as numerous as were the Symbolist-Decadent groups, manifestoes, and reviews, so numerous are the definitions of Symbolism and Decadence. Indeed, the entire movement may be said to have come to grief as a result of the lack of harmonious agreement on the part of the active leaders. Bitter charges and counter-charges, accusations and denials, declarations of principle which were greeted with salvos of acclamation and volleys of hisses, were so frequent that the ostentatious structure fell to the ground of its own weight. The two decades from 1880 to 1900 saw the most brilliant achievements of the Symbolist-Decadent revolt. Even as early as 1890, however, the first signs of rebellion were to be noted. On February 3, 1891, the movement saw itself apotheosized in the *Banquet du Pèlerin passionné*, tendered to the Symbolist leader, Jean Moréas, presided over by Mallarmé, and attended by two hundred denizens of the world of art and letters. Not very long after, Jean Moréas had seceded to found *l'Ecole romane*, taking many of the younger poets with him, and the first damaging breach had been made.⁸ The Symbolists struggled manfully on for another twenty years; but their efforts from 1900 to 1910 were comparatively feeble and the latter year may be regarded as the

⁸Ernest Raynaud, the author of the three-volume study of Symbolism from which many of the facts relating to the history of the movement that are here recorded are borrowed, was one of those who followed Moréas from the parent group into the *Ecole romane*.

"ultima Thule" of the Symbolist-Decadent movement as an official manifestation in contemporary French lyric poetry.

According to the story related by Ernest Raynaud, the Decadent wing of Symbolism received its name in the following interesting manner: One Sunday in the summer of 1886, a group of young poets who, for about a year, had tacitly accepted the leadership of Paul Verlaine as the Moses who was to lead them from the barren deserts of Parnassianism, were paying a visit to their chief at the Hôpital Tenon, where he was undergoing treatment for one of his arthritic attacks. Someone picked up from Verlaine's bed a journal bearing the rather extraordinary name of *le Décadent* and sneeringly asked what fool had thought of such a title. In no uncertain terms, the editor of the periodical, Anatole Baju, spoke up in defense of his choice, and Verlaine rallied to his support, calling to mind his own now celebrated line: "Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,"⁹ and expounding what he had in mind when he wrote these words. The term "décadent" had been applied with complimentary purpose to the poetry of such groups as the *Hydropathes*, the *Hirsutes*, the *Zutistes*, and others, as early as 1882 by Jules Laforgue, one of the most audacious of the innovators, and had been used in a derogatory sense by a critic of the *Temps*. The group accepted the epithet defiantly, as it did Baju's coinage of the noun "décadisme" to soften the harshness of the connotation of the adjective. Though the Decadents were primarily interested in literature, they concerned themselves also, to a certain extent, with political and socio-economic questions. Just as Romanticism, with its plea for "liberalism in literature," was one of the off-shoots of the French Revolution, so "décadisme" was one of the by-products of the political philosophy of anarchism which had attempted to foist itself upon France in the form of the Paris Commune of 1871. The Decadents had little in the way of a definite æsthetics, but voluntarily assumed the Voltairean role of

⁹"Langueur (*Jadis et naguère*—*Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 381—the volume is dated 1884).

destroyers of what had gone before. Into the arena of philosophical pessimism, as expounded by Schopenhauer, of scientific positivism as set forth by Comte, and of communistic socialism as preached by Karl Marx, the Decadents introduced the doctrine of literary anarchy, in which each poet was to be a law unto himself and rules and codes were to be consigned to the rubbish-heap. And just as Voltaire hastened the advent of the French Revolution although he would have deplored the violence which came in its wake, so Verlaine, who spent his last years ridiculing the excesses of the younger poets, was nevertheless the unquestioned leader of the Decadents and at least indirectly responsible for the incurable breach with the Romantic-Parnassian poetry which they engineered.

A word of caution may here again be injected as to the use of the word Symbolism. Thus far, we have been employing it to include, more or less vaguely, all the mushroom groups of poets which had sprung up in the wake of Verlaine and Mallarmé to assist, from the special points of view of their various conceptions of the new æsthetics, in the revolt against Parnassianism. In its strictest sense, however, "symbolisme" was the poetic attitude and technique of the disciples of Mallarmé, as "décadisme" was that of the followers of Verlaine, and the two sets of poets are known, respectively, as Symbolists and Decadents. Of the two groups, the latter might claim the advantage in point of time; the Symbolists, on the other hand, might boast of a more definite and positive philosophy of its art. Taking as their foundation Baudelaire's well-known poem, "Correspondances," wherein nature is described as "un temple" in which man passes through "des forêts de symboles" and "les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent,"¹⁰ the Symbolists, under the inspiriting leadership of Mallarmé, attempted to build up a theoretical structure for their poetics which might serve as adequate justification for their practice. The manifesto of the group, which amounted to

¹⁰*Les Fleurs du mal*, p. 108.

little more than a brief summation of the æsthetics of Mallarmé, was printed in the Paris *Figaro* for September 18, 1886, and was signed by Jean Moréas. Among other things, we are told that "le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la conception de l'Idée en soi. Ainsi dans cet art, les tableaux de la nature, les actions des humains, tous les phénomènes concrets ne sauraient se manifester eux-mêmes; ce sont là de simples apparences sensibles destinées à représenter leurs affinités ésotériques avec les Idées primordiales."¹¹

Baudelaire's theory of the interrelation of the sense-stimuli—especially as tending toward a *rapprochement* between poetry and music—and its development in the notorious synesthetic "vowel-sonnet" of Rimbaud, beginning: "A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles—"; the Mallarmean notion of the disappearance of the concrete object in the symbol whose function it is to evoke, and thereby create, the phenomenal world; the success of Wagner as a "tone-dramatist" and of Verlaine as a musical poet; these were the outstanding impulses behind the prosody which was before long to silence the last lingering protestations of Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, and Catulle Mendès, by this time almost the sole representatives of the "vanishing" Parnassian. It should be noted, however, that, perhaps with the single exception of Rimbaud, the Symbolist and Decadent poets wrote in a technique which, though it was considerably more flexible than was that of the Parnassians, still employed the alexandrine as its favorite verse-form, adhered, in the main, to the practice of syllable-counting for lines of given lengths (mute *e* reckoned as a full syllable before consonants and at the end of the verse), and, in general, refrained from what the Parnassians would have excoriated as faulty rhymes. In other words, what the Symbolists and Decadents employed was a "vers libéré" as opposed to the later "vers libre." The great immediate contribution of Verlaine and Mallarmé to French lyric

¹¹Quoted by P. Martino: *Parnasse et symbolisme* (Paris, Colin, 1925, p. 151).

poetry was the revivification of imagery, with especial emphasis upon the symbolic connotations of images, the broadening of the scope of subject-matter, so that it might include within its ken the sub-conscious as well as the conscious worlds, and the endowment of poetic form with a fluidity and a musicality which were to render simple the passage from "liberated verse" to "free verse."

Much has been made, especially by French opponents of the entire Symbolist-Decadent tendency, of the charge that the new poetry was largely the work of foreigners. The mere weight of numbers lends considerable force to this allegation. Thus, among the leaders of the numerous "ismes" are to be found the names of Gustave Kahn, of German Jewish origin, of Jean Moréas, a Greek by birth, of the Belgians René Ghil, Maurice Maeterlinck, Georges Rodenbach, Emile Verhaeren, of the Americans, Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin, and of the Italian, Marinetti. Ernest Raynaud, for example, declares as an irrefutable fact that the Symbolist movement in France, like that of the Romanticists in whom it had the source of its being, was of Anglo-German origin.¹² Without going into the ramifications of so debatable a question (and there are many unbiased students of French lyric poetry even in France who laugh such a statement to scorn), one might easily marshal a host of names of poets of unquestionably French descent to counterbalance those of the foreigners. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, the very core of Symbolism, were of purest French blood; so, too, were Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Jules Laforgue (of Breton parentage, but born in Montevideo, Uruguay, where his father was professor at the time), Albert Samain, Henri de Régnier, Francis Jammes, and Paul Fort. Ernest Raynaud himself, one of the earliest enthusiasts, is French of the French; to be sure, following in the lead of Jean Moréas, he was one of those who helped scuttle the Symbolist ship. The truth of the matter is that the Parnassian attitude had lost its hold because of its very rigorousness and that

¹²*Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 166.

French poetry was casting about for a new mould in which to pour its inspiration. If the English Pre-Raphærites and the Wagnerian music were for something in the Symbolist upheaval (and it should be remembered that that ultra-orthodox Parnassian, Catulle Mendès, was a rabid Wagnerite and that, on the other hand, the German Jewish critic, Max Nordau, could scarcely find sufficiently severe terms in his vilification of the French *fin-de-siècle* art),¹³ the Symbolist movement was none the less a genuine manifestation of the France of the end of the nineteenth century. Far from France's having borrowed the new æsthetics from other peoples, that country may, with considerable show of justice, if it should so desire, claim the credit for having sent out into the entire occidental world that rejuvenation of poetry which passes by the generic name of Symbolism.

In our study of Verlaine, we saw that, though in the main he adhered to the Parnassian versification, on several occasions he ventured "out of bounds." His affectations of the "Impair" might be termed the particular brand of prosodic liberty which he allowed himself; but he also tended towards a freedom of rhyme and rhythm, and, on several occasions, he went so far as to substitute assonance for rhyme. All this was but the preamble to that most radical of steps, the introduction of *vers libre* into French poetry. Now, if one is pressed for an exact definition of "free verse," one finds oneself in an *impasse*. In their eagerness to cast off every vestige of restraint and to permit the individual full play for his genius, the Symbolist poets hesitated to set any hard and fast limitations to their art. As a consequence, no two poets conceived of *vers libre* in precisely the same way. Approaching as near as possible to the underlying basis of "free verse," one arrives at the conclusion that it is entirely a matter of rhythm, and that each poet has a rhythm peculiar to himself which we must detect before we can properly understand him. This, of course, is exceedingly vague, and leaves us in the position of being forced to accept these poets largely on faith. All

¹³Vide his *Degeneration*, *passim*.

that can be said with any degree of positiveness is, paradoxically, almost entirely negative in nature. Thus, we know that "free verse" tends towards the abolition of rhyme (in its beginnings, it permitted of rhyme, which, however, has been banished from the "free verse" of our own day), it did away with rhythm as commonly understood to be a more or less regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. What the young poets were seeking was, broadly, a new type of rhythmic unit; this rhythmic unit was no longer the individual line, the couplet, or the regularly delimited stanza, but was the so-called thought-unit, which was to be contained in a free strophic structure allowing for the greatest possible latitude in number and length of lines. The length of the separate verses was determined, in the case of some poets, by the phraseological unit of the words composing them, in others, by the mere physical necessity of occasionally drawing a breath. Thus, the verse might vary in length from a single word or two words to several complete lines printed without a break; and the strophe might run from one line to two or three printed pages. Superficially, all this would seem to confirm the common charge that "free verse" is merely prose broken up, more or less arbitrarily, into lines of uneven length. Such an allegation, however, is not entirely true. The *vers-librists* who took their art seriously and were striving for an honest substitution of a fluid poetic medium for the outworn Parnassian moulds, did attempt to find something to take the place of rhyme and conventional rhythms. Some of the most favored substitutes were alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, repetition of striking words, ideational development through succeeding stages of the same or similar images. The claim is not here advanced that the French *vers-librists* were the first to make use of these tools. Even so classical a poet as Goethe occasionally abandoned rhyme and wrote in verses and stanzas of uneven length; and it would be supererogatory to call attention to the poetry of Walt Whitman. But what the *vers-librists* did they did not as isolated individuals but in a feeling of comradeship and with an *esprit de corps* which, for a while at least,

overpowered all opposition and established free verse as the dominant metrical technique. Though there would seem to have been a violent reaction away from free verse in the past decade, no one would dare to assert that it has run its course; if there were any to venture such a declaration, Alfred Kreymborg, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams and their colleagues of the Dial group in this country, not to mention a veritable legion of French and German poets and Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, the expatriate Americans making their home in Europe, might well rise in vociferous dissent.

The merit of having been the first in France to use the modern *vers libre* (as opposed to the so-called *vers libres* of Molière's *Amphytrion*, which is really a "strophe libre," with abandonment of the classical mode of strict alternation of feminine and masculine alexandrine couplets) has been warmly disputed. It would seem, however, that Rimbaud, some of the poems of whose prose-and-verse collection known as *les Illuminations* are in free verse and must have been written before 1873, the year in which he definitively disappeared from the literary arena, may lay the strongest claim to this honor. On the other hand the credit for having been the first publicly to sponsor the new poetry, both in theory and in practice, must go to Gustave Kahn (born in Metz in 1859) one of the most active of the warriors in the Symbolist-Decadent campaigns. As a director of the review, *la Vogue* (1886), in which he published Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, the manuscript of which he had received from Verlaine, and as founder of *le Symboliste* (1886), he gave encouragement to Jules Laforgue and others of the bolder spirits of the early days of the revolt against Parnassianism. In an article which appeared in *la Revue indépendante* in 1888 and was then affixed, in considerably enlarged form, as preface to the 1897 edition of his *Premiers poèmes*,¹⁴ Kahn set forth, in some detail, the basic fundamentals of free verse as conceived by him. This article and preface may be looked upon as the

¹⁴Paris, *Mercure de France*.

manifesto of *vers libre* as opposed to classical French verse even as modified by the Romanticists and the Parnassians, and expounded Kahn's theories on such matters as length of verse and strophe, freedom of rhyme and rhythm, the use of assonance and alliteration, the new function of the mute *e*, and the rhythmic unit. Most important of all, however, the *Premiers poèmes* reprinted *les Palais nomades* for which, when he published it in 1887, Kahn somewhat erroneously claimed the right to style itself the first collection of poems in *vers libre*.

If we examine *les Palais nomades*, we shall at once see that Kahn's conception of *vers libre* in 1887 was still at some remove from the free verse of today. Almost all the poems show rhyme of some sort; this rhyme, of course, is highly capricious and breaks, at every step, with the rigid "rich rhymes" of Banville and the Parnassians. Thus, Kahn did not hesitate to rhyme a singular with a plural noun, or a word ending in mute *e* with one ending in a consonant; and he frequently employs assonance or even makes a word rhyme with itself—all of which would have been considered monstrosities before 1880. The following is a typical stanza from *les Palais nomades*:

"Tes bras sont l'asyle
Et tes lèvres le parvis
Ou s'éventèrent les parfums et les couleurs des fleurs et des fruits,
Et ta voix la synagogue
D'immuables analogies
Et ton front la mort où vogue
L'éternelle pâleur

Et les vaisseaux aux pilotes morts des temps défunts.
Tes rides légères le sillage gracile
Des âges aux récifs difficiles
Où le chœur des douleurs vers tes prunelles a brui
Ses monocordes liturgies."¹⁵

But read this delicate little poem, which might almost have been signed by Verlaine:

¹⁵*Premiers poèmes*, p. 117.

"Pardonnez à la chair qui pleure
 Aussi à l'âme qui se meurt:
 Tout n'est que leurre.
 Pauvre moment
 Que celui où nous savons l'heure.

Et plaignez le pauvre dément.
 Toute rose a parfum qui pleure;
 Tout est aimant,
 Cause majeure,
 Et finit par les tournments."¹⁶

Not all of the *Palais nomades*, however, are so respectful of the verse in which they are written; many of them handle it far more cavalierly. Poems exemplifying the use of unconditionally "free" verse abound; the following is the first stanza of one of these:

"C'est vers ta chimère
 Vers les gonfalons et les pennons de ta chimère
 Que vont les désirs en pieux pèlerins,—
 Pèlerins fatigués des rythmes obsesseurs
 Reposez-vous à l'ombre acquise
 A l'ombre apaisée dormez les sommeils berceurs des haltes."¹⁷

If we would know Gustave Kahn at his most characteristic, however, we must read him in his *Livre d'images* (1897). The title of this collection of poems is indicative of their symbolic purpose and may have had some bearing upon the choice of the name "Imagists" by Amy Lowell and her cohorts. The *Livre d'images*, dedicated, interestingly enough, to that "friendly enemy" of the Symbolist æsthetics, Catulle Mendès, contains "pictures" of the Ile-de-France, of the Rhine, of the Provence, of the Orient, and attempts, by the painting of highly-colored word-miniatures, couched in terms chosen especially for their melliflence and their suggestiveness, to transport the reader into a fairy world of the imagination, where the very atmosphere breathes poesy and

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 112.

song. Indeed, what may be said to distinguish the Symbolist poet from his predecessor is his effort to create atmosphere and to superinduce moods rather than to evoke pictures or to stimulate thought. Consequently, adjectives and nouns connotative of the vague, the shadowy, the mysterious, of the whole super-terrestrial world of fancy, abound in the Symbolists. Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, perhaps the most successful Symbolist drama, is constructed fundamentally on this basis. In a poem of Kahn's called "la Maison du soir," we read of "the closed door of an evening house," "a vague shadow," "grey shutters," "a slow shadow," an "eternal palace," a "silenced harp," all in a single stanza of eight verses.¹⁸ Examples of this sort might be multiplied *ad libitum*; but enough attention has already been devoted to Gustave Kahn, from whom we may take our leave by the quotation of a typical "Image":

"Voici des blancs cortèges partis des palais blancs
où gémissent, sous les aiguilles de la glace, des navires,
où l'eau coule sous les murailles énormes, où l'ours blanc
monte sa garde dodelinante, et ses yeux sanguinolents
fouillent le blanc mystère qu'il surveille en grognant.

Voici les robes pâles des filles de Borée
dont on aperçoit les longues mains trop blanches,
et l'ourlet de leur robe glisse sur l'avalanche
lointaine et ronde comme les nuées
de plaisir précieux sous les pieds des madones
qu'ont peintes, aux murs d'église, les ferventes de l'été

Et des frissons fatiguent la chair de l'étang
et des rides courent sur la blancheur du front
et des pâleurs s'étendent sur la terre des routes
et le silence se fait plus profond,
car on n'entend qu'un sifflement,
et les dogues du vent bondissent sur les routes
à l'appel rugueux de reines de misère,
les heures de neige et de glace qui ne pardonnent
ni ses fleurs, ni ses blés à la terre dévastée."¹⁹

¹⁸*Le Livre d'images* (2nd ed., Paris, Mercure de France, 1897, p. 193).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 181-82.

Gustave Kahn, then, served well, both by his actual poetry and by his critical pronouncements, the twin cause of Symbolism and *vers libre* in France. If he might claim some degree of priority in the composition and the stimulation of free verse, he would not so readily be granted the palm of superiority among the disciples of Verlaine and Mallarmé. Many were those who might contend for these laurels with him, but none so justly as Jules Laforgue, one of the most unbridled innovators in that whole unbridled epoch.

Jules Laforgue,²⁰ though he died when he was only twenty-seven (his dates are 1860 to 1887), left an indelible impress upon the literature of his time. At an age at which most men have scarcely completed their formative period, he had experienced much, thought a great deal more, and published the few slender volumes which were to form a composite milestone in the literary pilgrimage of the century. Born in Montevideo, he had, at the age of six, been brought by his father to France, and he spent his next nine years in the southern town of Tarbes. Here, his father having returned to Uruguay, he was reared by none-too-affectionate relatives, celebrated his first communion, had his first love-affair, and proved a mediocre student at the local *lycée*. In 1876, he went to Paris to meet his family which had now definitely abandoned Montevideo, continued his studies with no greater success, and remained, after the departure of his father and brothers for Tarbes, to eke out a precarious existence as secretary to the director of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*. His leisure he devoted to the completion of his education along the two lines of culture which most attracted him—poetry and philosophy. He read widely and retentively, and was especially influenced by Baudelaire, on the one hand, and, on the other, by Schopenhauer and Edouard von Hartmann, the German philosopher of the *inconscient*. After a brief period of deep mysticism which for a short while made of him a rigorous ascetic, he found Catholicism unsatisfactory and became what he himself

²⁰For a sympathetic study of his life and work, vide François Ruchon: *Jules Laforgue—sa vie, son œuvre* (Geneva, Ciana, 1924).

styled a "mystical pessimist."²¹ His secretarial drudgery and his voracious reading left him but little time for literary composition; the necessary leisure he was fortunate enough to obtain when, through the assistance of Paul Bourget and other well-wishers, he procured the post of reader to the Empress Augusta, wife of William I of Germany, a position which he held from 1881 until his betrothal to an English girl, a Miss Leah Lee, in 1886. It was during this period that he wrote his most important work: the poems included in *les Complaintes* and in *l'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*,²² the short mock-idyllic poem, *le Concile féerique*,²³ and the group of amazing prose parodies known as the *Moralités légendaires*. After a brief betrothal, Laforgue crossed over into England for his marriage to Miss Lee, and almost immediately thereafter fell victim to a swift-moving consumption which carried him to a premature grave in August of 1887.²⁴

The importance of the work of Laforgue is to be found in the tone of ironic pessimism which pervades everything he wrote, to which nothing seemed sacred, and which punctured, as though it were a mere toy balloon, the pompous stiffness and often flatulent seriousness of the more unbending Parnassians, especially of Leconte de Lisle and his disciples. Constantly preoccupied by philosophic doubts, he found the solution of his torments in the pessimism of Schopenhauer and in Hartmann's theory of the "unconscious" world as the fatalistic determinant of the destinies of men. Laforgue might well have exclaimed, with Mallarmé: "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres," and it was a release from the disappointed intellectualism and the dry rationalism of his adolescence that he sought

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

²²Published by Vanier in 1885 and 1886, respectively.

²³First printed by Gustave Kahn in *la Vogue* for July 12-19, 1886, and then issued separately as a *plquette*.

²⁴The Vanier edition of Laforgue's *Poésies complètes* (Paris, 1902) includes a group of posthumous poems assembled under the title of "Derniers vers." This edition, however, is not nearly so complete as that of the *Mercure de France* (3 vols., Paris, 1902-03).

and found in the two German philosophers and voiced in his writings. Once he had become convinced of the futility and the ugliness of life, even in what are ostensibly its most supramundane manifestations, such as love and religion, the only saving grace for him was to view it as a sort of huge cosmic jest. From this point of view, it is anything but surprising that Laforgue looked with disdain upon the hidebound technique of the Parnassians and rejected any system of æsthetics which based itself upon preconceived notions of absolute beauty and good taste.

Herein are to be found Laforgue's contribution to the new poetics and the reason for his deification by the Symbolists. Beginning with verses of fairly regular construction, Laforgue was soon reveling in the practice of poetic licenses of the most extravagant nature; though for the most part he employed rhyme in his poems, he was guilty of audacities in this particular that might well have made the hair of Leconte de Lisle and Heredia stand on end. Moreover, his vocabulary represented the extreme of the daring for the early days of post-Parnassianism; no word was for him too colloquial, too vulgar, provided it lent to his context the precise shade he desired. Finally, his conviction as to the futility of life and the mutability of all things as directed by the predetermined and ungovernable laws of the "unconscious" caused him to seize eagerly upon the constantly changing phenomena of the outer world and to fix them in his poetry in the dress of bitter irony. This application of a noumenal system to the most ordinary incidents of human conduct, which, incidentally, frequently cloaks the poems of Laforgue in a thick robe of obscurity, was what especially appealed to the Symbolists; and the clownish wantonness of his technique led directly to free verse, at which he occasionally tried his hand, and as a result of which he was later acclaimed by the *vers-librists*, along with Rimbaud and Gustave Kahn, as founder of their sect.

Coming now to the poetry of Laforgue, we must content ourselves with a few illustrations of the principles which

he enunciated in his correspondence and in numerous scattered and oftentimes fragmentary notes published posthumously under the title of *Mélanges posthumes*²⁵ or still extant only in manuscript. At the very outset of *les Complaintes*, the poet states, in fairly regular alexandrines, his philosophy of life:

"Je sais! la vie outrecuidante est une trêve
D'un jour au Bon Repos qui pas plus ne s'achève
Qu'il n'a commencé. Moi, ma trêve, confiant,
Je la veux cuver au sein de *l'Inconscient*."²⁶

The titles of the poems in this first collection are illuminating: there are, among others, a "Complainte de cette bonne lune," a "Complainte des Pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers," a "Complainte des formalités nuptiales," a "Complainte du soir des Comices agricoles," a "Complainte du Temps et de sa commère l'Espace," a "Complainte de l'Epoux outragé." These poems reveal an extraordinary variety of metrical and strophic forms, an enormous verbal fecundity which did not hesitate to use, side by side, colloquialisms and neologisms, scientific terms and vulgarisms, archaisms and inventions à la *Rabelais*, a free-and-easy mixture of comic verve, irony, and philosophic seriousness. Some of the poems are almost totally incomprehensible, and are certainly the source of the futuristic and dadaistic writing of more recent times, of what might be called "stream-of-consciousness" writing, like T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*, and James Joyce's monumental novel, *Ulysses*. Such, for example, is the "Complainte de l'automne monotone" (a burlesque, perhaps, of Verlaine's "Chanson d'automne") one of the stanzas of which reads:

²⁵Vol. III of the *Mercure de France* edition of the *Œuvres complètes de Jules Laforgue*.

²⁶*Poésies complètes*, Vanier edition, p. 9.

"Le vent, la pluie, oh! le vent, la pluie!
 Antigone, écarter mon rideau;
 Cet ex-ciel tout suie,
 Fond-il *decrecendo, statu quo, crescendo*?
 Le vent qui s'ennuie,
 Retourne-t-il bien les parapluies?"²⁷

Even more extreme is the "Grande complainte de la ville de Paris,"²⁸ written in "prose blanche," which is probably at least partly responsible for Amy Lowell's "polyphonic prose." The opening lines of this poem read: "Bonne gens qui m'écoute, c'est Paris. Charenton compris. Maison fondée en—à louer. Médailles à toutes les expositions et des mentions. Bail immortel. Chantier en gros et en détails de bonheur sur mesure. Fournisseurs brevetés d'un tas de majestés. Maison recommandée. Prévient la chute des cheveux," and so on, for three solid pages. Perhaps one need look no farther for the sources of Joyce's abracadabrant word-medley beginning: "Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steely ringing. Imperthnthnthnthnthn."²⁹

Most of the "Complaintes," however, are not by any means so cryptic as the ones just cited. Some of Laforgue's best effects are gained by the clothing of profound thoughts in the language and metrical form of the *chansonnier*. Such, for example, is the case for the "Complainte de cette bonne lune," in which the stars sing, in imitation of the merry dancers on the bridge at Avignon:

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53. One is reminded of T. S. Eliot's
 "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
 And on her daughter.
 They wash their feet in soda water."

("The Waste Land"—*Poems 1909-25*, London, Faber and Gwyer, 1925, p. 75).

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 126-29.

²⁹*Ulysses* (Paris, Shakespeare & Co., 1924, p. 245).

"Dans l'giron
 Du Patron,
 On y danse, on y danse.
 Dans l'giron
 Du Patron
 On y danse tous en rond."³⁰

The fœtus of the poet emerging from his mother's womb exclaims:

 "En avant
 Cogne, glas des nuits! filtre, soleil solide!
 Adieu, forêts d'aquarium qui, me couvant,
 Avez mis ce levain dans ma chrysalide!
 Mais j'ai froid! En avant!
 Ah! maman . . .

Vous, Madame, allaitez le plus longtemps possible,
 Et du plus seul de vous ce pauvre enfant terrible."³¹

The "Complainte sur le mot 'Falot, falotte'"³² shows Laforgue playing, in highly musical verse, with the images called up by these two words, and thereby pointing the way to much of the work of Gustave Kahn and the Imagists. And so one might go on indefinitely, multiplying quotations to illustrate the impish genius of this strange philosophical poet, so antithetically different from his contemporary in the *genre*, the frequently elephantine Sully Prudhomme. We may conclude our consideration of the *Complaintes* with the citation of the last poem of the group, "Complainte-Epitaphe":

"La Femme,
 Mon âme:
 Ah! quels
 Appels!
 Pastels
 Mortels,
 Qu'on blâme
 Mes gammes!

³⁰*Poésies*, p. 22.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 40.

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 120-22.

Un fou
S'avance
Et danse.

Silence
Lui, où?
Coucou."³³

A sonnet over which Heredia, if he ever read it, must certainly have come close to strangling.

All that has just been said of the *Complaintes* applies with identical force to the *Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*, dedicated to Gustave Kahn and to the memory of "la petite Salammbô, prêtresse de Tanit." The same philosophical undercurrent, the same verbal anarchy, the same technical in-trepidities. The irony here is, perhaps, more sustained, the lips of the poet are here curled in an even more hopeless sneer. In "Guitare," for instance, the moon is an "astre sans cœur et sans reproche," a "Maintenon de vieille roche";³⁴ "Clair de lune" begins with the lines:

"Penser qu'on vivra jamais dans cet astre,
Parfois me flanque un coup dans l'épigastre."³⁵

"Pierrots" expresses succinctly the poet's wilful nonchalance and his total lack of faith. We read:³⁶

"Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental:
'Je t'aime pour toi seul!'—Oh! là, là, grêle histoire;
Oui, comme l'art! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire
Du capitaliste de l'Idéal!

Elle faisait: 'J'attends, me voici, je sais pas'
Le regard pris de ces larges candeurs de lunes;
. . . . Oh! là, là, ce n'est pas peut-être pour des prunes,
Qu'on a fait ses classes ici-bas.

Mais voici qu'un beau soir, infortunée à point,
Elle meurt! Oh, là, là; bon, changement de thème!
On sait que tu dois ressusciter le troisième
Jour, sinon en personne, du moins

³³*Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

Dans l'odeur, les verdure, les eaux des beaux mois!
Et tu iras, levant encor bien plus de dupes
Vers le Zaïmph de la Joconde, vers la Jupe!
Il se pourra même que j'en sois."

On which note of extremest cynicism we may well leave Jules Laforgue, roguishly continuing his post-mortal existence amid the shades of the "unconscious" universe, accompanied by the spectral plaudits of his Symbolist worshippers.

The basic deficiency of the entire Symbolist movement—its petty intestine wars, the "romantic irony" which fostered a constant self-dissatisfaction and which robbed it of much of its endurance—is well illustrated by the career of a poet who shared with Laforgue and Kahn the leadership of the new rebellion and was one of its most outspoken apostles—Jean Moréas. Of Greek origin (his father's family name was Papadiamantopoulos), Moréas was born in Athens in 1856, but was given a thoroughly French training, in the course of which he was especially attracted by the poets of the Renaissance and of the Romantic period. None the less, his first ambition seems to have been to participate in the poetic revival which took place in the Greece of the last century and he is known to have written verses in the modern variant of the tongue of Pindar and Anacreon. Coming to Paris at the age of fifteen, however, he succeeded not only in completely expatriating himself but even in rising to a position of prominence in the literary turmoil of the feverish decades of 1880 and 1890. An æsthete after the manner of that other expatriate, Heredia, Moréas soon became, nevertheless, a *habitué* of the cafés which served as meeting-places for the groups of rebels against Parnassianism, and he was carried unresistingly on the tide of the new poetry. We have already seen that it was Moréas who signed the Symbolist manifesto of 1886, and his published verses of this period show him making a strenuous effort to follow in the wake of Mallarmé and of Gustave Kahn. By 1890, he had taken rank as one of the unquestioned leaders of the younger generation of poets, and upon the publication of his verse-collection, *le Pèlerin*

passionné, in 1891, he was tendered a banquet which was one of the outstanding literary events of the year. Truly the Symbolists might feel, with some degree of assurance, that they had definitely routed the Parnassians and that the standard for the new verse would henceforth wave proudly atop the ramparts of contemporaneous poetry! Picture their amazement, then, when Moréas, on the very morrow of his apotheosis, turned Judas and founded a new school, *l'Ecole romane*, which was to cause the first important gap in the wall the Symbolists had with such difficulty erected. In the manifesto of his group of dissenters, issued in 1891, Moréas declared for a return to "le principe gréco-latin, principe fondamental des *Lettres* françaises, qui florit aux XI^e, XII^e, XIII^e, siècles avec nos trouvères; au XVI^e avec Ronsard et son école; au XVII^e avec Racine et La Fontaine. . . . L'école romane française renoue la chaîne gallique, rompue par le romantisme et sa descendance parnassienne, naturaliste et symboliste."³⁷ And as though to heap coals of fire upon the heads of his astounded former followers, he announced his divorce from Symbolism which, he somewhat unfeelingly remarked, "j'ai un peu inventé." "Le Symbolisme," he goes on, "qui n'a eu que l'intérêt d'un phénomène de transition, est mort."³⁷ If this death certificate was a trifle premature, Moréas' defection certainly hastened the demise of the so recently buxom and sportive movement.

Moréas' *Ecole romane*, though it swept into its fold several gifted poets who had helped to play the rôle of midwife at the birth of Symbolism, did not enjoy much greater longevity than did many of the other secessions from the parent groups. Its most significant literary achievement, perhaps, was its founder's six books of *Stances* (1899-1901), and its true value lies in the fact that it pointed the way to a return to the neo-paganism of Ronsard and du Bellay, of Racine and André Chénier. Other poets, notably Henri de Régnier and Albert Samain, were to carry on Moréas' work as individuals rather than as members of a

³⁷Quoted by Martino, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

school, and by the time of Moréas' death in 1910, his *Ecole romane* was as defunct as he had declared Symbolism less than two decades before.

In a consideration of Moréas' poetry, his first published collection, *les Syrtes* (1884), appearing a year before Lafogue's *Complaintes* and three years before Kahn's *Palais nomades*, in a word, before Symbolism and free verse had become *faits accomplis*, need detain us only a moment. The twenty-eight-year-old poet is here singing of the "reefs" past which his youth has had to make its way, and the song is pitched throughout in the tonality of Lamartine and of Baudelaire. One brief poem will suffice to give the general *timbre* of the group:

"Je veux un amour plein de sanglots et de pleurs,
Un amour au front pâle orné d'une couronne
De roses dont la pluie a terni les couleurs.
Je veux un amour plein de sanglots et de pleurs.

Je veux un amour triste ainsi qu'un ciel d'automne,
Un amour qui serait comme un bois planté d'ifs
Ou dans la nuit le cor mélancolique sonne;
Je veux un amour triste ainsi qu'un ciel d'automne,
Faits de remords très lents et de baisers furtifs."³⁸

When we come to *les Cantilènes* (1886), we are "en plein symbolisme." All the elements of the purposely slipshod technique which the Symbolists opposed to the polished marble of the Parnassian poetry are at hand—faulty rhymes, the use of the "Impair," assonance, and, here and there, a sort of *vers libre* marked by complete absence of rhyme. For subject-matter, Moréas dallied with folk-lore, in consonance with the Symbolist opposition of the wholesomely simple and the uncultured to the bored sophistication of the Parnassians, or he plunged into the imagistic intellectuality of Mallarmé. A series of poems grouped under the thoroughly Mallarmean title of "le Pur concept" is a conscious striving after the ideation and the phraseology of the Symbolist chief. One of the poems, for instance reads:

³⁸*Premières poésies* (Paris, *Mercure de France*, 1907, p. 38).

"Sous la rouille des temps je suis un vieux blason.
 Chère galère avec ta riche cargaison,
 Es-tu prise à jamais dans les glaces du pôle
 Voici l'heure qui tinte et la *chanson du saule*.

Mon regard fatigué contemple l'horizon
 Monotone, à travers les barreaux d'un geôle.
 Je suis l'herbe fauchée et l'arbre qu l'on gaule.
 Voici l'heure, male heure, et la male saison.

Mais que me font ces fleurs qui meurent sur la tige,
 Et ces parfums remémorés, et le vertige
 Des royales splendeurs et des épiscopats;

Car mieux que dans la nuit close des sépultures,
 Daimôn auguste du Concept, oh! n'ai-je pas
 Trouvé l'oubli sacré dans tes prunelles dures!"³⁹

In the primitive style, "la Mauvaise mère" is a ballad of an unfaithful wife who serves her husband the heart of their son for his evening meal. A characteristic stanza runs:

"Au bord du fleuve bleu
 Où mouillent les frégates
 Mon fils, va donc jouer
 Avec tes camarades."⁴⁰

And, *per contra*, "l'Epouse fidèle" celebrates the loyalty of a wife to her husband who has been these seven years at the wars and her joy when, upon his return, he establishes his identity. A stanza marked by an assonance similar to that just cited is the following:

"Dans ton jardin le myrte
 Fleurit même en octobre
 Une lampe d'ivoire
 Brûle dans ton alcôve."⁴¹

With such weapons did Moréas assist in dealing Parnassianism its *coup de grâce*. But he was soon to tire of these weapons.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 207-08.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 170.

Moréas' return to the fold of French classicism was not accomplished at one stroke. An intermediate stage, in which the poet might still be seen dallying with the licences of Symbolism, had to be traversed. This stage was marked by the publication of *le Pèlerin passionné*, in which we see Moréas, more particularly in the revised version of 1893, substituting for the subject-matter of the Symbolists themes drawn, on the one hand, from classical antiquity and, on the other, from pre-classical France. The titles of some of the poems in the collection reveal the new bent: "Enone au clair visage," "Galatée," "le Dit d'un chevalier qui se souvient." There is a group of eclogues entitled "Allégories pastorales" and a series of twenty-three "Sylves." The language and the stylistic ornaments constitute an attempt at a resuscitation of the poetic speech of Ronsard and his contemporaries; the atmosphere throughout is that of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Archaisms and bold neologisms of Greek and Latin derivation abound, with the result, as critics have pointed out, that the verses frequently seem artificial in their strange attire and produce the effect of clever imitation and little more. A few of the poems, however, have a gem-like form and an apparent sincerity which lift them above their sisters. Such, for example, is the following:

"J'ai tellement soif, ô mon amour, de ta bouche,
Que j'y boirais en baisers le cours détourné
Du Strymon, l'Araxe, et le Tanaïs farouche;
Et les cent méandres qui arrosent Pitané,
Et l'Hermus qui prend sa source où le soleil se couche,
Et toutes les claires fontaines dont abonde Gaza,
Sans que ma soif s'en apaisât."⁴²

The technical irregularities in this poem are typical of the volume and tell the tale of a Moréas still bending under the yoke of Symbolism. The Moréas of the last years could never have written the eighth of the "Sylves":

"Un troupeau gracieux de jeunes courtisanes
S'ébat et rit dans la forêt de mon âme.

⁴²*Le Pèlerin Passionné* (Paris, Vanier, 1893, p. 41).

Un bûcheron taciturne et qui frappe
De sa cognée dans la forêt de mon âme.

Mais n'ai-je pas fait chanter sous mes doigts
(Bûcheron, frappe!) la lyre torse trois fois!

(Bûcheron, frappe!) n'est-elle pas, mon âme,
Comme un qui presse de rapides coursiers!"⁴³

The years of the last decade of the nineteenth century saw the gradual disappearance from Moréas' poetry of all traces of the Symbolist taint. The six books of *les Stances* are composed of poems in regular alexandrine quatrains, which are permeated with the classical attitude towards life. Even the hold of the *Pléiade* had been weakened, and it was now the poet's ambition to emulate Racine in style and thought. The cycle had been completed; born under Mediterranean skies, Moréas, after a period of vagabondage in foreign climes, had found his true haven in the bosom of his classical ancestors of Greece, Rome, and France.

This fact, as has previously been intimated, is important not so much for the career of Moréas, the false imitative-ness of so much of whose verse in considerable measure vitiates its total effect, as for its indication that French poetry had turned the corner of Symbolism and was headed in the direction of normal versification and lucid content. This tendency is best illustrated in the work of Albert Samain (1858-1900) and of Henri de Régnier, both of whom reveal in their early work the successive influence of Parnassianism and Symbolism. Samain's *Aux flancs du vase* (1898), for instance includes a series of miniatures reminiscent of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and written in the finest traditions of delicacy and harmonious clarity. "La Tourterelle d'Amymone" may be cited by way of testimony to the rapidity with which French poetry was breaking away from its Symbolist moorings. We read:

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 96-97. The text has "ou frappe" in the third line of this poem, but this seems to be manifestly a misprint for "qui."

"Amymone en ses bras a pris sa tourterelle,
 Et la serrant toujours plus doucement contre elle,
 Se plaît à voir l'oiseau, docile à son désir,
 Entre ses jeunes seins roucouler de plaisir.
 Même elle veut encor que son bec moins farouche
 Cueille les grains posés sur le bord de sa bouche.
 Puis, inclinant la joue au plumage neigeux,
 Et toujours plus câline et plus tendre en ses jeux,
 Elle caresse au long des plumes son visage,
 Et sourit, en frôlant son épaule au passage,
 De sentir, rougissant chaque fois d'y penser,
 Son épaule plus douce encore à caresser."⁴⁴

Henri de Régner, born in 1864 and still active as poet and novelist, in both of which capacities he has earned high distinction, also followed the path of Moréas and Samain from Symbolism back to traditionalism. A member of the French Academy since 1911, Régner is now acclaimed by his admirers as the leading poet of present-day France. Régner's abandonment of Symbolism was probably hastened by his marriage to the daughter of Heredia, whom he held in the highest esteem and whose memory he has done much to perpetuate; his wife, who writes under the pseudonym of Gérard d'Houville (a slight distortion of the name of one of her father's maternal ancestors) has herself won her laurels both as poet and as novelist. Régner's neo-paganism is to be found in its finest flower in *la Sandale ailée* (1906), dedicated to the memory of Heredia; the title of another of his verse-collections, *Médailles d'argile* (1900), calls to mind the *Trophées*. A brief poem of Régner's, "la Nymphe de la source," may serve to bring to a close this consideration of the Moréas reaction from Symbolism and its consequences (we should hasten to add that even in *la Sandale ailée* there is a striking example of *vers libre*, "Septembre") :

"Si tes pas t'ont conduit vers l'heureuse vallée
 Ou la source murmure au milieu des roseaux,
 Souviens-toi, voyageur, que sa paix embaumée
 Est due à la fraîcheur qu'y répandent mes eaux.

⁴⁴*Aux flancs du vase* (74th edition, Paris, *Mercur de France*, 1922, pp. 47-48).

Ce sont elles qui font les fleurs douces éclore,
 Et verdir l'arbre vaste, agréable à tes yeux,
 Et si, dormant auprès de son âme sonore,
 Tu vois, nue à tes pieds, la Nympe de ces lieux,

Vénère-la. Reprends ton chemin sans offense,
 Contente-toi de l'ombre où tu t'es abrité,
 Du bruit mélodieux qui s'ajoute au silence,
 Et de la coupe bue à mon flot argenté."⁴⁵

We have already had the opportunity of observing, in our discussion of the work of Gustave Kahn and of the earlier verse of Moréas, how the younger generation, following the lead of Verlaine, had swung away from the rigid pompousness of the Parnassians and had cultivated the simple and the spontaneous in the emotions of men and of peoples. Poetry, it was the feeling of many, must breathe not of *blasé* gallantries in musk-scented *salons* or *boudoirs* but of the healthy, vigorous life of the fields and the woods, of the strong passions of the poor and consequently unspoiled folk of village and hamlet. The impetus given to the study of folk-lore by the German Herder a hundred or more years before had been crystallized into the innumerable "ballads" and "lieder" of the Romanticists of his country—Goethe, Bürger, Uhland, Brentano—but had not awakened much response in the France of "mil huit cent trente." It remained for Zola and the Naturalists to turn to the soil for subject-matter, and it was not until the very end of the century that the beauty of simple peasant life was transmuted into poetry of a high order. The man who performed this miracle was Francis Jammes, and his success was so instantaneous that it constituted a separate current in the Symbolist stream which he himself amusedly termed *Jammisme*.

The creator of *Jammisme* was born in an obscure village in the French Pyrenees in 1868 and was totally unknown in Paris upon the appearance of his first slim collections of verse. A volume bearing the simple title of *Vers*, published

⁴⁵*La Sandale ailée* (9th edition, Paris, *Mercur de France*, 1913, pp. 102-03).

in 1893, attracted the attention of the *Mercure de France*, and Jammes determined to give up his position as notary's clerk by means of which he was supporting his widowed mother and himself. With only occasional absences for brief trips, Jammes has passed his entire life in the Pyrenean town of Orthez, to which he has been attached with all the fibers of his being, and has industriously composed volumes of verse and prose all water-marked with the *simplicisme* which has characterized not only his writing but also his mode of living. Early in the present century, Jammes underwent an access of piety which brought him humbly into the bosom of Mother Church where, until then, he had not felt completely at his ease. Since then, his life has been that of sage and lay saint in the eyes of his fellow-villagers and his work has been definitely religious in tone. As though prosodic liberty were not consonant with true apostolic zeal, Jammes has turned from the freest of free verse, which served as the vehicle for his earlier, and actually more significant, poetry to the practice of the verse-forms hallowed by four centuries of uninterrupted use in France. The defection of Jammes, like that of Moréas and Rénier, was a battering-ram blow which noticeably weakened the fortress of Symbolism.

Jammes' most enduring work is to be found in the volume entitled *De l'Angelus de l'aube à l'Angelus du soir*, comprising poems written from 1888 to 1897, and published in 1898. Here, as throughout his career, Jammes is, in the words of Amy Lowell, so admirably qualified to appreciate him at his true worth, "the poet of contentment, of observation, of simplicity."⁴⁶ Or, to quote the poet himself:

"C'est la simplicité, la pauvreté d'hier

Et de demain. Ce sont les simples doux et fiers"⁴⁷

which furnish the matter for his verse. The subjects for his poems are drawn from the homely life about him—the

⁴⁶*Six French Poets* (New York, Macmillan, 1915, p. 217).

⁴⁷From "Un Jour," a dialogued poem dedicated to Rénier and included in *De l'Angelus de l'aube à l'Angelus du soir* (13th edition, Paris, *Mercure de France*, 1908, p. 300).

interior of his house, the village of which he was a loyal citizen, his garden, his orchard, his animals, of which he was exceedingly fond (notably of dogs and donkeys)—with here and there a nature-description or a love-lyric in somewhat more exalted tone. The language of these poems fairly smells of the earth; the poet does not recoil before the most expressive vulgarisms when he needs them to clinch his effect. His figures are of a vigorous simplicity, drawn from his observation rather than from his imagination. Of rhetorical devices there are few, but the poet is especially fond of stanzaic balance and of repetitions with the accretions characteristic of the popular ballad. Thus, he describes the poet in his dialogue already cited, in the following somewhat Biblical style:

"Il n'est pas triste. Il est grave et pareil aux bois.
Il est pareil aux maisons des campagnes douces,
Il est pareil aux tranquilles et douces mousses.
Il est pareil aux fumées calmes des vieux toits.
Il est pareil à la rivière vers le soir,"⁴⁸

and so on, for five more lines; then follows a ten-line strophe of parallel similes for the poet's *fiancée*. The *naïveté* in which Jammes consciously cloaked his verse is nowhere more evident than in the poem entitled "J'aime l'âne," which begins:

"J'aime l'âne si doux
marchant le long des houx.

Il prend garde aux abeilles
et bouge ses oreilles,"⁴⁹

and continues in the same strain through twenty-six couplets. Some of the best-known poems of the collection are "les Villages," "la Salle à manger," and "le Calendrier utile," the first lines of which run:

"Au mois de Mars (le Belier Y) on sème
le trèfle, les carottes, les choux et la luzerne,"⁵⁰

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 12-15.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 119.

and which, to quote Amy Lowell once more, "for accuracy might be taken from some Farmer's Almanac."⁵¹ All the devices of the *vers-librists* are employed in profusion: unrhymed verses, careless rhymes, assonances, total absence of syllable-counting, all manner of variety in length of line and of stanza, the most irregular rhyme-schemes, and, in addition, the whimsical refusal (present also in the poetry of Gustave Kahn) to capitalize the initial letters of verses except where they begin new sentences. "Amie, souviens-toi" is composed of lines of from nine to nineteen syllables, with no regularity in their arrangement; the opening verse reads:

"Amie, souviens-toi de ce jour où les prairies étaient de pierre."⁵²

Verlaine, when he jestingly boasted that he had perpetrated a line of seventeen "feet," little realized that such supposed monstrosities would, before very long, receive the sanctification of usage at the hands of the *vers-librists*.

Two poems may here be reproduced to show us Jammes in the *campagnard* mood and in that, less usual for him, of the erotic. The first of these is "J'ai fumé ma pipe en terre":

"J'ai fumé ma pipe en terre et j'ai vu les boeufs,
avec la barre au front et le museau morveux,
résister aux paysans qui leur piquaient la croupe
par-dessus les cornes—et j'ai vu, douce troupe,
défiler les brebis touffues aux jambes faibles.
Le bon chien faisant semblant d'être en colère.
Et le berger lui criait: Loup! Viens! Loup! Ici!
Alors le chien joyeux gambadait jusqu'à lui
et mordait son bâton d'un air facétieux
sous la tranquillité du chaud ciel pluvieux."⁵³

The other poem, almost Verlainean in character, is "Tu seras nue":

⁵¹*Op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁵²*De l'Angelus*, p. 201.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 64.

"Tu seras nue dans le salon aux vieilles choses,
fine comme un fuseau de roseau de lumière,
et, les jambes croisées, auprès du feu rose,
tu écouteras l'hiver.

A tes pieds, je prendrai dans mes bras tes genoux.
Tu souriras, plus gracieuse qu'une branche d'osier,
et, posant mes cheveux à ta hanche douce,
je pleurerai que tu sois si douce.

Nos regards orgueilleux se feront bons pour nous,
et, quand je baiseraï ta gorge, tu baisseras
les yeux en souriant vers moi et laisseras
fléchir ta nuque douce.

Puis, quand viendras la vieille servante malade et fidèle
frapper à la porte en nous disant: le dîner est servi,
tu auras un sursaut rougissant, et ta main frêle
préparera ta robe grise.

Et tandis que le vent passera sous la porte,
que la pendule usée sonnera mal,
tu mettras tes jambes au parfum d'ivoire
dans leurs petits étuis noirs."⁵⁴

Of especial interest to Americans and, therefore, deserving of at least passing attention here, are the two Symbolist poets, Francis Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill. Both were French on the maternal side; both were born in the United States, Vielé-Griffin in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1864, and Merrill in Hempstead, Long Island, in 1863; both were taken to France as children, received their education there, and always considered themselves Frenchmen, although Merrill studied law at Columbia University and has written critical articles for American journals.⁵⁵ Both poets began their careers under the Parnassian influence and later wrote (Merrill died in 1915) in the best *vers-libre*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

⁵⁵These facts are taken from Prof. G. L. van Roosbroeck's *Anthology of Modern French Poetry* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1927). This is a very attractive little volume and highly satisfactory for the purpose it is meant to serve.

traditions and published verse-collections which take their place among the more important achievements of the Symbolist era. Excellent examples of Merrill's use of free verse are to be found in the volume entitled *les Quatre saisons* (1900), dedicated to Vielé-Griffin and depicting the natural phenomena in the successive seasons and their reflection in the soul of the poet; typical are "Renouveau," "Eveil," which begins:

"C'est la paix
C'est toute la paix lente et blanche de ce matin d'automne
Parmi les cloches qui sonnent
Sur la forêt,"⁵⁶

"le Vrai temple," and "A une prostituée" (the human incarnation of winter). Many of these poems affect the simplicity of Francis Jammes; one of them, "Plein air," may be cited:

"La mère étend des linges dans la cour
En chantant une chanson d'amour,
Le père bêche, les poings durs, au jardin,
En souriant aux clairs lendemains.

Un oiseau sous le lierre ne cesse
Ses trilles qui perlent comme de la pluie,
Et l'on entend, sous la corde qui la blesse,
Grincer la poulie du puits.

C'est le paisible labeur au soleil
Dans l'enclos de la petite maison
Où moururent, vieux enfants qu'on veille,
Tant d'aïeux au son des oraisons.

Soudain, en crispant les mains,
Le nouveau-né se réveille à la faim
Dans son berceau que la brise balance
Comme une nourrice murmurant une romance.

⁵⁶*Les Quatre saisons* (2nd edition, Paris, *Mercur de France*, 1900, p. 64).

Et la mère qui lave dans la cour
 Cesse, pensive, sa chanson d'amour,
 Et le père qui bêche au jardin
 Fronce le front aux soucis de demain."⁵⁷

One of the avenues, then, of the Symbolist reaction from Parnassianism led straight back to the soil, to the simple joys and sorrows of the people of France. Here we have a nationalistic trend which is markedly absent from the work of such radicals as Leconte de Lisle, Louis Ménard, and Anatole France, from that of such cynics and pure intellectuals as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, from that of such joyous Epicureans as Banville and Glatigny. This trend is, perhaps, most emphatically stressed in the poetry of the man who, since 1912, has held the somewhat gratuitous title of "Prince des poètes"—Paul Fort. Born at Rheims in 1872, Fort, at an early age, made a name for himself in Paris literary circles by establishing, in 1890, the *Théâtre d'art*, which for three years performed a heroic service in the cause of the French theatre by producing plays of Verlaine, Remy de Gourmont, and especially Mæterlinck, which might otherwise never have appeared behind the footlights. This devotion to art—Fort could not possibly have expected any pecuniary rewards from this venture as he was not even able to pay the playwrights and the actors, who, sharing his enthusiasm, gladly contributed their collaboration gratis—has characterized the poet's entire career. Since 1897, when the *Mercure de France* published his *Ballades françaises*, Fort has worked indefatigably, with the result that there are now more than twenty volumes of these singular ballads and that the poet has seriously presented his candidacy for the French Academy.⁵⁸

These ballads have just been qualified as "singular." Wherein does this singularity reside? In a very individual

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸He has collaborated with Louis Mandin in the preparation of a *Histoire de la poésie française depuis 1850* (Paris, Flammarion, 1926). This work is a rather complete catalogue of French poets of the past three-quarters of a century.

caprice, as a consequence of which the vast majority of them, although composed in a more or less regular metrical form, are written as though they were prose. The exact opposite, this, of what the scoffers would call the Symbolists' habit of writing prose as though it were poetry. But Fort did more than merely this; for, though many of his poems are poured into a rather strict alexandrine or other prosodic mould so that one has only to discover the metrical key to solve the riddle of a given poem, just as many do not lend themselves so readily to solution. What he actually did has been so succinctly and so successfully stated by Amy Lowell that we can do no better than quote her *verbatim*: "The *vers-librists*," she tells us, "had hardly been accorded permission to exist, in the minds of the crowd, before Paul Fort appeared with a still greater innovation. Briefly it was this:—He alternated prose and verse at will, going from one to the other without any transition, sometimes changing from one to another in the same stanza. To make this possible, he printed his poems as prose, and the change into rhyme only became evident when the poem was read; with the greater number of readers, undoubtedly, this change was never noticed until the poem was read out loud. He never attempted to write *vers libre*, nor is he to be classed among the *vers-librists*." (Miss Lowell should, at this point have stated that many of Fort's lines might properly be classed as blank verse, with a definite rhythm but with an absence of rhyme. It should also be noted, moreover, that Miss Lowell's conception differs from that of the original *vers-librists*, and that Fort may certainly be said to have used free verse in the sense that Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, and Jean Moréas used it). "His verse is almost always the alexandrine pure and simple; sometimes, however, his lines are of eight syllables or of ten. In very few cases has he departed from either strict prose or strict verse. Only, he says that he follows the colloquial pronunciation of the *Ile-de-France*, which means really Paris. In other words, he practically suppresses the mute *e*, after the fashion of conversation, instead of counting it in the

traditional French manner."⁵⁹ Here, of course, is one of the originals for Amy Lowell's own "polyphonic prose," as employed in such of her volumes as *Can Grande's Castle*, and the significance of Paul Fort's work for present-day poetry the world over at once becomes patent.

This whimsy of Fort's, of writing verse as though it were prose, for a long time blinded his fellow-countrymen to his genuine poetic genius. Despite the fact that he wrote in popular language of subjects dear to most Frenchmen, he has complained that he is not widely read by the masses. As a matter of fact, his poetry is so impregnated with the history and the art of his country and with a pervasive subtle irony as not to be readily grasped by the unlettered, although the folklore of his people plays a not inconsiderable rôle in his work. What Fort attempted was to distill the flavor and the aroma of France—its past, its present, its future, its soil, its sky, its streams, its kings, its heroes, its commoners—into a poetic attar which should be immediately and unmistakably identifiable. Though only his first volume bore the title of *Ballades françaises*, it has justly been pointed out that all of them might have been given the same appellation; and when, in 1918, Fort sat down to make a representative selection from the *corpus* of his work, he entitled the result *Anthologie des ballades françaises, 1897-1917*.⁶⁰

The highly individual tang of Fort's poetry can not be adequately described; it can be apprehended only from a reading of the poems themselves. When one attempts, however, to choose typical specimens from the twenty volumes of *ballades*, one is confronted with an "embarrassment of riches." Some of the volumes, like *le Roman de Louis XI* (1898), deal largely with historical, or ostensibly historical, matter; others, like *les Idylles antiques* (1900), show us a Fort steeped in the mythology of Greece and Rome; still

⁵⁹*Op. cit.*, pp. 290-91.

⁶⁰Published by the *Mercure de France*, which had also brought out the first eight volumes; the next eight were issued by Figuière, and succeeding ones by Emile-Paul, Monnier, Payot, and Fasquelle.

others, like *Ile-de-France* (1908), concern themselves with the poet's favorite corner of his beloved France; and others again, like *Paris sentimental* (1902) and *Que j'ai de plaisir d'être Français!* (1917), include his best purely lyrical and subjective verse. All that space permits us to do here is to reproduce a short, yet characteristic, example of each of the above four types. In the historical *ballade*, Fort, a modern *trouvère*, sings in verse racy of the soil, of the glorious achievements of his nation; most of the poems are too long for citation, and we shall have to content ourselves with the following selection taken from the very beginning of *le Roman de Louis XI*:

"Quand Jean le Damoisel et Pierre Crolavoine, suivis à pas fourrés de tout le parlement, à la lumière de deux cents torches, eurent enrichis d'un nouveau corps royal la basilique de Saint-Denis, au bord de Charles VI fut placé Charles VII, et tout fut consommé de la cérémonie.

Puis, quand ce fut notoire et bien un point d'histoire, honnêtement crié par toutes les provinces, qu'au Royaume de France il était mort un prince, qu'il fut bien avéré qu'on l'avait enterré, tranquillement agile l'aimable dauphin Louis se glissa de l'exil rêvant d'allier la gloire avec l'économie."⁶¹

To illustrate Fort's use of mythology, we shall quote only the opening stanzas of a poem on Icarus, the style of which testifies to the wide range of the poet's talents and to his amazing versatility:

"Fougueux, sa chevelure fouettée des vents de mer, quel homme traîne ainsi le vertige à ses pieds? Son long cri de triomphe enlance les vallées de longs cercles d'échos tournoyant dans les airs.

Aurore! est-ce un esprit échappé des enfers? Quel homme, avec deux ailes d'or, s'est envolé? Il traverse en criant le ciel couleur de chair, qu'une aube verte encor glace de ses lauriers.

Il va. Le soleil monte. Il atteint sa lumière, se couvre des rayons comme de plumes d'or, les perce de ses ailes, et va plus vite encore. Son image et son ombre le suivent sur la mer.

Il court, il nage, il monte dans la chaude atmosphère, et s'y roule et s'y plaît. Quel homme ose voler? A la renverse, il plonge, et c'est l'azur! O sphères.—Son épaule plus largement a palpité."⁶²

⁶¹Vide *Anthologie des ballades françaises*, p. 45.

⁶²From *les Idylles antiques et les Hymnes*, *ibid.*, p. 71.

This poem, it will be immediately recognized, is written in almost perfectly correct alexandrines and in an exceedingly dignified language, so that, broken up into verses, it might well be taken for the work of a Parnassian. Not so, however, the following description of "Senlis matinale," with its assonances, its freedom in the handling of the mute *e*, and its other irregularities:

"Je sors. La ville a-t-elle disparu ce matin? Où s'est-elle envolée? Par quel vent, dans quelle île? Je la retrouve, mais n'ose plus étendre les mains. Senlis est vaporeuse comme une mousseline.

"Moi, déchirer Senlis? prenons garde. Où est-elle? Toits et murs sont un transparent réseau de brume. Notre-Dame livre à l'air sa gorge de dentelle, son cou si fin, son sein léger couleur de lune où bat l'heure irréal, que seuls comptent les anges, tant l'écho s'en étouffe dans l'oreiller du ciel fait des plumes doucement étendues de leurs ailes, où Dieu repose un front qui vers Senlis se penche."⁶³

To conclude, we may bring Fort into our presence in elegaic mood, as in the following "Souvenir":

"Eh! n'est-ce pas en de gentils soleils semblables que je t'ai par la vie et l'amour emportée?—C'était l'hiver, c'était le printemps, puis l'été—ou l'automne, en forêt, dans une nimbe adorable: ton visage rendait la lumière ineffable.

"Nous sommes à présent l'un devant l'autre et gais du gai soleil perçant les rideaux bouton d'or. Je me souviens de nos amours passant un gué. Quoi, nous fûmes jusqu'à Nijni? Que sais-je encore? Te souviens-tu des aubes sur la Mer du Nord?

"Point? Ecrivons tous deux, d'une froide écriture, moi ton nom, toi le mien sur le carreau crissant. Deux cris plaintifs *en nous* crispent notre figure. Es-tu gaie à présent? Suis-je gai? Non, bien sûr—Que ton silence est long! que mon courage est lent!

"Et nous étions deux feux qui rayaient la nature."⁶⁴

One might continue almost indefinitely (and the temptation to do so is very strong) this discussion and illustration of the Symbolists and their frequently antithetical tendencies. Numerous are the poets who clamor for mention

⁶³From *Ile-de-France*, *ibid.*, pp. 163–64.

⁶⁴Vide *Que j'ai de plaisir d'être Français!* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1917, pp. 212–13).

in such a study as this: René Ghil (born in 1862), the founder of an "évolutive-instrumentiste" school and the author of an important disquisition on the new poetics as conceived by him, *le Traité du verbe* (1885); Remy de Gourmont (1858–1915), far better known as critic than as creative artist; Maurice Maeterlinck (born in 1862), the outstanding dramatist of the Symbolist movement, who began as a poet; Charles Guérin (1873–1907), Tristan Corbière (1841–1875), to whom, along with Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, has sometimes been given the credit for the break with Parnassianism, Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont (1847–1870), Paul Valéry (born in 1862), a Symbolist at the outset of his career but now looked up to by many of the younger poets and critics in France as their country's greatest and most original thinker and writer. These and many others well deserve a few pages in any consideration of the development of Symbolism. Our prime concern, however, has been with the Parnassians, and the Symbolists have come in for treatment only as the engineers of the revolt which broke the hold of Leconte de Lisle and Banville upon nineteenth-century French verse and thus paved the way for the myriad modes of poetic self-expression which have literally spawned in France in the past five decades. By way of facilitating the transition from the Symbolists to the French poets of our own day, we shall cast a brief glance at the work of one remaining representative of the Verlaine-Mallarmé schools who, like Moréas, Régnier, and Jammes, gradually worked his way to a more stable, less hectically flushed, poetics—Emile Verhaëren.

Like Maeterlinck, Albert Mockel, Max Elskamp, and others prominent in the Symbolist triumph, Verhaëren was a Belgian, having been born not far from Antwerp in 1855. After a comparatively regular course of study, which terminated upon his graduation from the University of Louvain with the licentiate in law, and after a short stage in a barrister's office, Verhaëren determined to throw in his lot with the group of young poets who were to earn for

their country a place of importance in contemporary French letters. From 1883, when his first volume, *les Flamandes*, was published, until his death at Rouen in 1916, he gave himself heart and soul to the profession of his choice. He was a prolific writer, and his numerous volumes earned him a place in the front rank of the poets of his day. His fame extended far beyond the borders of his native Flanders; indeed, when, in 1915, Amy Lowell delivered the series of lectures which make up her *Six French Poets*, she began with Verhæren, because he was "the best known" of the writers she had chosen to discuss.⁶⁵ The significance of Verhæren is concisely stated by Miss Lowell in the paragraph which concludes the chapter devoted to him and which we may take the liberty of quoting: "What Verhæren has done for poetry is this. He has made it realize the modern world. He has shown the grandeur of everyday life, and made us understand that art and science are never at variance. He has shown that civic consciousness is not necessarily dry and sterile, but can be as romantic as an individual. And he has done all this without saying it directly, by force of the greatest and most complete art."⁶⁶

Verhæren attained to the apogee of his power in the two verse-collections known as *les Campagnes hallucinées* (1893) and *les Villes tentaculaires* (1895).⁶⁷ The picture of country life painted in *les Campagnes hallucinées* is the very antipodes of that which George Sand gives us in such of her novels as *la Mare au diable*; the peasant of Verhæren is poverty-stricken, diseased, ignorant, superstitious, and bestial. The *leitmotif* of the collection is the insinuation, to be deduced from the fact that seven of its sixteen poems are "chansons de fou," that the peasant is at least semi-imbecilic and that he lives under the constant spell of the hallucinating life of the cities. The first verse of "la Ville,"

⁶⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁷The first edition of *les Villes tentaculaires* also included *les Campagnes hallucinées*, and the two collections have been printed as one volume ever since (8th edition, Paris, *Mercure de France*, 1913).

the opening poem of the volume as it is now published, strikes the keynote: "Tous les chemins vont vers la ville."⁶⁸ This fact, which has occasioned so much ink-spilling on the part of economists and sociologists in recent years, is again stressed in the last stanza of "le Départ," where we read:

"Tandis qu'au loin, là-bas,
Sous les cieux lourds fuligineux et gras,
Avec son front comme un Thabor,
Avec ses suçoirs noirs et ses rouges haleines
Hallucinant et attirant les gens des plaines,
C'est la ville que le jour plombe et que la nuit éclaire,
La ville en plâtre, en stuc, en bois, en marbre, en fer, en or
. . . Tentaculaire."⁶⁹

These lines serve admirably to introduce the companion-collection, *les Villes tentaculaires*. The scene has now shifted from the desolate fields, whose symbol is "la bêche lamentable et nue,"⁷⁰ and which have become the site of hideous factories, to the busy city, with its shops and its stock-exchange, its theatres and its animated harbor, its cathedrals and its prostitutes, its barracks and its labor-troubles. All these the poet sings in a tone not of exultation, but rather of grim resignation to the triumph of science and machinery. It was his unwillingness to accept joyously the new age that made of Verhæren a transitional poet. It remained for such poets of these days of ours as Jules Romains, Blaise Cendrars, Paul Morand, and Valéry Larbaud to attempt a sympathetic comprehension of the twentieth-century world and to reconcile it with their art. For Verhæren, the city offers a scarcely more heartening aspect than does the country. Listen to this stanza from "l'Ame de la ville":

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 97.

"Elle a mille ans, la ville,
 La ville âpre et profonde;
 Et sans cesse, malgré l'assaut des jours,
 Et les peuples minant son orgueil lourd,
 Elle résiste à l'usure du monde.
 Quel océan, ses cœurs! quel orage, ses nerfs!
 Quels nœuds de volonté serrés en son mystère!
 Victorieuse, elle absorbe la terre;
 Vaincue, elle est l'affre de l'univers:
 Toujours, en son triomphe ou ses défaites,
 Elle apparaît géante, et son cri sonne et son nom luit,
 Et la clarté que font ses feux dans la nuit
 Rayonne au loin, jusqu'aux planètes!"⁷¹

Towards the close of the poet's life, his attitude as regards both city and country underwent modification; so, too, did his verse which, from having been thoroughly free in its structure, except for the fact that rhyme was always present, showed a gradual tendency in the direction of regularization. The death of Verhæren in 1916 may be said to have marked the terminus of the pre-bellum lyric poetry of twentieth-century France.

Symbolism, it has earlier been said, collapsed under its own mass. What it set out to achieve was nothing more nor less than a complete regeneration of both the matter and manner of poetry; what it actually accomplished was the substitution of new sets of rules for others which it had disclaimed with contempt. The offspring of Parnassianism, it had inherited the theory of *l'art pour l'art* and had discarded almost everything else; and in its self-righteousness it so abused the doctrine of "art for its own sake" that it, in turn, provoked a reaction towards a more traditional, less esoteric, æsthetics. Many of the poets who had heralded its approach as though it were the dawn of the Messianic age soon turned from it, as we have seen, in complete disillusionment. Critics, including many who had at first showed themselves warmly sympathetic, waxed sarcastic at its expense and flayed it with acerbity. Parodists

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 117.

(and nothing is so easy to burlesque as Symbolist poetry)⁷² made it the target of attacks which amounted to a *reductio ad absurdum*. And the excesses to which it gave rise in the form of such schools of dissenters as Marinetti's *futurisme* and Tristan Tzara's *dadaïsme* served to turn away the lovers of the beautiful and the sane in poetry. Here, for example, are the first lines of a poem by Tzara called "Maison flake":

"déclanchez clairs l'annonce vaste et hyaline animaux du service
maritime
forestier aérostatique tout ce qui existe chevauche en galop de clarté
la vie
l'ange a des hanches blanches parapluie virilité
neige lèche le chemin et lys vérifie vierge
3/25 d'altitude un méridien nouveau passe par ici
arc distendu de mon coeur machine à écrire pour les étoiles."⁷³

Not, to be sure, that *vers libre* has run its course or that the poets of today are returning *en masse* to the metrics of a Ronsard, a Racine, a Hugo, or a Leconte de Lisle. A cursory examination of any anthology of present-day French poetry—especially of the pages devoted to such men as André Gide, Jean Cocteau, André Salmon, Paul Claudel, and André Spire—will serve to demonstrate the contrary. But the truth seems to be that the Symbolist era, though it was fraught with achievement constructive as well as destructive, was but a passing phase which, having left poetry considerably the richer, has played its part and bowed itself from the stage. The poetry of tomorrow will unquestionably be compelled to take Symbolism into account, but only as one of the elements in a series, of which classicism, Romanticism, Parnassianism, and realism enjoy at least equal importance. The best poetry of tomorrow will probably be a synthesis of these elements, illuminated by that spark of its own special genius which lends durability to all great art.

⁷²Vide *les Délivrescences d'Adoré Floupette* (1885), by Gabriel Vicaire and Henri Beauclair, which was a frank burlesque of the early Symbolists but was, at first, accepted as genuine.

⁷³Vide *Anthologie des poètes nouveaux* (10th edition, Paris, Kra, n.d., p. 408).

AFTERWORD

We have completed our ascent of the French Parnassus. Our voyage, to be sure, has been somewhat hurried; we have paused only occasionally, in order to look about us at some especially ravishing bit of landscape or to gaze in awe at some particularly towering peak. We have attempted to follow the winding path of French lyric poetry from its beginnings in Carolingian times, past the courtly song of the Middle Ages, the magic music of Villon, the classical graces of the *Pléiade* and its eighteenth-century successor, André Chénier, the opulent efflorescence of the Romanticists and their offsprings, the Parnassians, to the multiform Symbolists and their even more bewilderingly hydra-headed sons and daughters of present-day France. If we have permitted ourselves to tarry longest beside the Parnassians, it is because these poets seemed to deserve an attempted rescue from the oblivion which has engulfed most of them in English-speaking countries and because they bring to fine flower the processes of the traditional French metrics while bearing within themselves the seed of the new and far less conventional poetics of our own day. One frequently catches oneself wondering whether poetry is capable of growth in so inhospitable a soil as this twentieth-century civilization would seem to be; in these moments of depression, one may well go to the Parnassians for encouragement, to those Parnassians who, amid such iconoclastic intellectual phenomena as *The Origin of the Species*, *Madame Bovary*, and the "useful theatre" of Dumas fils and Augier, continued the expenditure of the best of their energies in the externally thankless, inwardly soul-satisfying, effort to translate the hidden beauties of life into the ethereal marble of lyric poetry.

APPENDIX A

Alphabetical Table of Contributors to the three issues of *le Parnasse contemporain*. The Roman numerals refer to the volume, the Arabic numerals in the parentheses to the number of poems in a given volume.

- Ackermann, Louise, III (1).
Aicard, Jean, II (5), III (1).
Artois, Armand d', III (2).
Autran, Joseph, III (1).

Banville, Théodore de, I (2), II (12), III (24).
Barbier, Auguste, II (7).
Baudelaire, Charles, I (15).
Bergerat, Emile, III (1).
Blanchecotte, Mme. Auguste, II (4), III (2).
Blémont, Emile, III (1).
Bonnières, Robert de, III (4).
Bourget, Paul, III (4).
Bourotte, Mélanie, III (1).
Boyer, Philoxène, I (6).
Breton, Jules, III (2).

Callias, Nina de, II (2).
Cazalis, Henri, I (8), II (2), III (6).
Chatillon, Auguste de, I (1).
Cladel, Léon, II (1), III (3).
Colet, Louise, II (2), III (4).
Coppée, François, I (5), II (18), III (6).
Coran, Charles, I (4), II (3).
Cosnard, Alexandre, II (2).
Cros, Charles, II (2).

Delthil, Camille, III (2).
Deschamps, Antoni, I (8), II (1).
Deschamps, Emile, I (8), II (3).
Dierx, Léon, I (6), II (5), III (8).
Dusolier, Alcide, III (2).

Essarts, Alfred des, II (2).
Essarts, Emmanuel des, I (4), II (1), III (2).

Fertiault, F., I (3).
Forni, Jules, I (5).
Fourcaud, B. de, III (4).
France, Anatole, II (2), III (1).

- Gautier, Théophile, I (6), II (4).
Gineste, Raoul, III (2).
Glatigny, Albert, II (4).
Grandet, Léon, II (2).
Grandmougin, Charles, III (2).
Grenier, Edouard, II (1), III (6).
Guy de Binos, III (2).
Guyon, Isabelle, III (1).

Heredia, José-Maria de, I (6), II (1), III (25).
Hervilly, Ernest d', II (3), III (7).
Houssaye, Arsène, I (11).

Lacaussade, Auguste, III (4).
Lafenestre, Georges, II (5), III (1).
Laprade, Victor de, II (1), III (2).
Laurent-Pichat, II (1).
Leconte de Lisle, Charles-Marie-René, I (10), II (1), III (1).
Lefébure, Eugène, I (6), II (1).
Lemoyne, André, I (4), II (3), III (1).
Lepelletier, Edmond, I (2).
Luzarche, Robert, I (4), II (2).

Mallarmé, Stéphane, I (10), II (1).
Manuel, Eugène, II (4), III (4).
Marc, Gabriel, II (4), III (1).
Marrot, Paul, II (1).
Martin, Alexis, I (1).
Ménard, Louis, I (6), II (7).
Mendès, Catulle, I (5), II (7), III (1).
Mérat, Albert, I (8), II (7), III (4).
Millien, Achille, III (1).
Monnier, Marc, III (4).
Musset, Paul de, III (1).
Myrten, III (1).

Penquer, Mme. Auguste, II (1).
Piedagnel, Alexandre, I (2).
Pigeon, Amédée, III (5).
Plessis, Frédéric, II (4), III (12).
Popelin, Claudius, II (8), III (2).
Pradelle, Gustave, II (4).

Ratisbonne, Louis, III (2).
Rayssac, Saint-Cyr de, III (5).
Renaud, Armand, I (4), II (1), III (1).
Rey, Henry, II (1).
Ricard, Louis-Xavier de, I (10), II (2), III (1).

- Richardot, H., III (1).
Ringal, Gustave, III (4).
Robinot-Bertrand, C., II (2).
Rollinat, Maurice, III (1).

Sainte-Beuve, C.-A., II (1).
Salles, Louis, II (3), III (1).
Siefert, Louisa, II (6), III (6).
Silvestre, Armand, II (11), III (6).
Soulay, Joséphine, II (2), III (6).
Sully Prudhomme, I (3), II (5), III (1).

Talmeyr, Maurice, III (1).
Tesson, Francis, I (1).
Theuriet, André, II (2), III (1).

Vacquerie, Auguste, I (3).
Valabrègue, Antony, II (1), III (6).
Valade, Léon, I (5), II (4), III (4).
Verlaine, Paul, I (8), II (5).
Vicaire, Gabriel, III (7).
Villemin, Eugène, I (1).
Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Auguste de, I (3), II (1).

Winter, Henry, I (2).

APPENDIX B

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